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The paradox in paradigms

By Ernest Gellner

BARRY BARNES:
T. S. Kuhn and Social Science
135pp. Macmillan. £12 (paperback,
£3.95).
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It has been said that anyone capable of forming grammatical sentences containing the words *supply* and *demand* can pass for an economist. Anyone aspiring to pass for a philosopher would have to master a slightly longer list of expressions. In recent decades, however, there could be no doubt as to which word would head the list: *paradigm*.

Paradigms were patented in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn in a book called, promisingly, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The title itself was a sign of the times. Before the First World War, any book of this sort would have been called *The Nature of etc.* and between the wars, it would have rejoined in the title of *The Logic of ...* but by the 1960s, *structure* was the thing. The book had a lot going for it, quite apart from the title and its success was well deserved. It was brief, elegant, extremely well written, and it has a powerful, important, and easily intelligible central idea, conveyed by the term "paradigm".

To explain the significance of that idea one must first give a very brief history of the philosophy of science. Once upon a time, the empiricist/positivist/inductivist view (choose your own term, without prejudice) prevailed. It taught that the secret of science was that the scientist began with careful, as far as possible unbiased observations. When he had amassed a lot of them, they would fall into a certain pattern, which he had some ("inductive") grounds to expect to persist into the future. If it did not, the scientist was under some suspicion that he had not attended to the facts carefully enough; either he had not collected enough of them, or he had allowed his own anticipations to influence his perception of the pattern.

This account of science was powerfully challenged by Sir Karl Popper, as he now is, who pointed out, in effect, that who could gather data until you were green in the face, and nothing would happen unless you also had an interesting idea, and this would only be engendered, if at all, by the fact that you were deeply troubled by some scientific problem. In fact there was no way of guaranteeing that it would ever be engendered, still less that the idea would be any good. But what mattered, from the viewpoint of the advancement of knowledge, was that when (if) you did have it, you were then willing to look with honesty at whether some data contradicted that idea; or rather, that the scientific community was so organized as to ensure that whether or not you had

the honesty, courage and intelligence to locate contrary evidence, someone else (who, not being the parent of the idea in question, would be less likely to be partial to it) would oblige, *mit oder mit-ohne Schadenfreude*, and seek out counter-examples and counter-arguments. The moral of the story was that good scientists were not fact-grubbers, but proponents of daring theories (the more daring the better), who bravely drew fire from any fellow-member of the scientific community who noticed their exposed, and deliberately unsheltered, stance. No blame attached to being wrong - only to taking cover. This theory had and has great merit.

One of the reasons for the importance of Kuhn's theory was that it provided what Popper recognized as the most interesting challenge to his own Kamikaze theory of science and scientists. Kuhn's central point is that the overwhelming majority of scientists do not observe this Popper-commended canonical code of cognitive daring: they do not propose risky theories so that their immolation on the altar of science should advance learning by eliminating one further possibility. On the contrary, they uncritically accept the current dominant vision, the *paradigm*, and only work on points of detail within it. You can question some theories of the time, and all theories at some time, but you cannot question all theories all the time. Radical revolutions in science, as in politics, occur but rarely, when a system collapses and thereby obliges those who inhabit it to erect something fundamentally new.

What is very important for understanding Kuhn is that he said not merely that this is how things were, but also that this is how things should be. Had he merely noted the prevalence of "normal" (paradigm-respecting) science, the Popperians could have replied - and in fact they said this anyway - well, so much the worse for those timid conformists. They may in fact behave in this way, but the sooner they stop, the better for the advancement of knowledge. But Kuhn plausibly argued that this sheepish conformism was not just a weakness, but a necessary precondition of the very existence of science. He deliberately goes out of his way to shock the Popperians and all wishy-washy, well-meaning liberals, by statements such as that, "... to turn Sir Karl's view on its head, it is precisely the abandonment of critical discourse that marks the transition to science" (*The Essential Tension*, 1977).

Just as Hobbes claimed that obedience to a Sovereign was the precondition of a Commonwealth, so Kuhn claimed that obedience to a paradigm - a cognitive sovereign - was the precondition of a scientific community and its cumulative work. Fundamental alternatives of vision are seldom if ever conclusively

settled: if each worker on the great scientific enterprise feels ever free and inclined to re-open those issues, nothing much gets done, even if it fails to be done at the highest and deepest intellectual level. Kuhn had noticed this happening amongst social scientists when he rubbed shoulders with them at a think-tank (and as a matter of fact, one of his worst mistakes is the tacit assumption that pre-scientific humanity at large, and modern social scientists, resemble each other).

So paradigmatic order must be established first: and if, from time to time, it becomes too cramping, well, a timely revolution will set things to rights again. Here the parallel with Hobbes values order as a precondition of creativity, has a more sympathetic appreciation of the usefulness of the occasional revolution. Not too often, mind. The source of the difference between these two thinkers is in part that politics, unlike science, is a Yes/No business, which does not lend itself to the idea of indefinite, open-ended progress, some romantic counter-claims notwithstanding.

This account should have made plain, roughly, what a paradigm is. If you want to know with precision what it is, there is trouble. Paradigms seem to come in all shapes and sizes. Barry Barnes notes this in the book under review, as others have noted it before him:

[Paradigms] include changes in the common culture of the educated elite of the whole of Europe, and esoteric modifications in the accepted problem-solutions of small groups of highly specialized professionals. They are generally defined as reticulating operations with important consequences for research practice, but they are occasionally treated more abstractly as changes in cosmology, or world-view. One is bound to wonder why Kuhn has never thought to prune and discipline this initial diversity of sense.

This is a strange complaint from Dr Barnes's pen, for as we shall see, his own central doctrine is that diversity and homogeneity of sense are matters of human taste and choice, not imposed on us by the nature of things. He seems to use the very tool which he officially disowns: perhaps, like the famous ladder of Wittgenstein, fastidiousness about excessive diversity of sense is disposable after use.

In the meantime, one may indeed deplore Kuhn's failure to circumscribe his key term. The main problem facing him hinges on the definition of *paradigm*. It is: does Kuhn lead to a relativist impasse? Take a strong, but natural and plausible interpretation of him which would treat paradigms as pervasive ways of seeing and interpreting things, so that the limits of a paradigm are the

limits of a world, the very limits of intelligibility. And remember the principle: no conceptualization without paradigmization! In other words, you cannot ever get at things-in-themselves, as they are when unmediated by any paradigm. You can only bump your head against the limits of one paradigm, and if it hurts too much, take a running jump to another paradigm, and if you land safely, congratulate yourself that it hurts less.

But there is no way of answering the question - or even of asking it sensibly - whether the new paradigm is closer to reality than the old one, whether the *salto mortale* from one paradigm to the next constituted an improvement. You cannot answer or ask this question - which none the less remains tempting, natural and insistent - because in order to answer it, you'd have to look at the naked nature of things as they are without any paradigm, and *ex hypothesi*, this cannot be done. If Kuhn defines science in terms of paradigms - he has modified his views on this point - it follows that you cannot sensibly talk about a progressive paradigm-shift in science.

The trouble with this cogent argument is that it blatantly contradicts something that Kuhn and most other people also believe, namely, that science has made progress. Yet if science is inherently paradigm-bound, and paradigms are mutually incompatible (with no third, inter-national or rather inter-paradigmatic conceptual currency in terms of which exchange-rates could be established) - both views appear to be firmly held by Kuhn - then no coherent sense can be made of the view that, in the series of paradigms which have succeeded each other in the history of science, the later ones constitute an improvement on the earlier ones, as being closer to "reality".

A milder interpretation of Kuhn might seem to get him out of this difficulty. Such an interpretation would turn paradigms, not into an inescapable conceptual skin, but merely into a kind of beneficial collective *life fix*. It is then no longer a pervasive presupposition, fitting each of any set of optional concrete alternatives, whilst also constituting the limit of intelligibility; it becomes simply an instant premise, whose denial is perfectly intelligible, but which will not in a given intellectual climate allow itself to be denied. People under its sway will twist and turn material until it fits in. But if too many "anomalies" make them twist and turn too much, a point will be reached when they prefer to seek a new compulsion.

Kuhn certainly also often talks as if this were the situation, and this version might seem to get him out of the relativist impasse. What this interpretation in effect does is to treat the observations of common sense or

of sense perception as contact with more or less paradigm-free things-in-themselves, which consequently can, especially when combined into large corporate bodies - or rather, large turbulent *frondes*, revolutionary mobs, People's Courts - sit in judgment on paradigms, and eventually mete out revolutionary justice to them. (*Wissenschaftsgeschichte ist Volksgeschichte?*) A paradigm is superior to another if it generates fewer anomalies, or smaller *frondes*. Starting out from an acceptance of a good deal of Kuhn's account, the late Imre Lakatos did in fact try to work out a philosophy of science along these lines. The trouble is - how do you count assemblies of anomalies? How do you assess the destructive potential of a revolutionary mob? Some small ones may be lethal, some large ones innocuous.

It is difficult to defend this milder version either on merit or as an accurate account of Kuhn. As Barnes notes, Kuhn himself seems to exclude this version: "These points are vividly conveyed in Kuhn's final and most radical argument for the incomparability of paradigms. Those committed to alternative paradigms ... carry out their research in different worlds (cf. Kuhn, 1970, pp. 111ff.)." If you inhabit *different worlds*, that's it; for there is no third, trans-paradigmatic world. Barnes goes on to say that, none the less, this can't mean "a denial of the existence of a single shared physical environment", because there are too many references to such a thing in Kuhn's work. This only follows on the assumption that Kuhn is consistent on this point, and that I doubt. His favourite comparison of paradigms is to Gestalten, and of paradigm change to Gestalt-switch. But the whole point about two rival Gestalten is that it makes no sense to ask which one is the right one. Kuhn's *truth* is the affinity between two powerful and incompatible insights; (1) no scientific knowledge without paradigm-bound conceptualization, and (2) some paradigms are better than others.

So much for Kuhn's predicament. Barnes's book about him, notwithstanding its title and the fact that Kuhn is pervasively discussed throughout the volume, isn't really about Kuhn. It is not an exposition, or an attempt to solve Kuhn's problem. (That problem does not trouble Barnes much.) The book *uses* Kuhn to propound a philosophy and sociology of its own. It is not claimed that this is already to be found in Kuhn's actual words or intentions. Rather, it is claimed that Kuhn's valid insights, properly understood, lead to this position. Kuhn, on this view, is a lying Barnesian; sometimes a very badly lying one, and unaware of the direction in which his own work is pointing.

Barnes's own doctrine, like Kuhn's, can perhaps best be understood

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through a consuetudine of what it denies. Barnes, most helpfully, identifies his enemy with clarity and emphasis. His name is the *Modernist mythologist*. Now what dualism does Barnes have in mind? At so crucial a point, it is best to let the author use his own words, and set the scene, which he does with heavy irony:

Many theories of knowledge are morality plays set in a Manichean cosmos. The source of light is experience; its agent, "reason". The source of darkness is culture; its agent, authority. ... Truth, validity, rationality, objectivity are to be seen among the many white-apparelled children of the light: error and irrationality, custom, convention, dogma and many others are dressed in black.

This is the vision Barnes is repudiating, and he thinks he can use Kuhn to help him do so.

It is worth asking why Barnes wishes to destroy this Manicheism. It is a perfectly legitimate question by its own lights, for he recommends speculation about motives. The answer seems obvious and pervades the book. Barnes is concerned to eliminate the difference between science and other activities. Nature and convention must at long last cease to be enemies, and must come together in a united world, and be malleable to the same kind of sociology. And what kind may that be?

Conceptual fabrics, including those in the natural sciences, have the character of hermeneutic systems; and all that has been written of such systems ... applies in the context of science.

And earlier:

However clear nature's communications might be, they are not coded in language: nature does not describe herself. It is we who give meaning to her messages. ...

And furthermore:

To favour one paradigm rather than another is in the last analysis to express a preference for one form of life rather than another - a preference which cannot be rationalized by any non-circular argument. ...

The last quotation is primarily an exposition of Kuhn, but of a part of Kuhn's argument which Barnes warmly endorses. The context of the quotation is *fortuitously* (Barnes's own word) Kuhn holds this, otherwise his position could not be sustained.

Now what is all this about? Basically, Barnes dislikes a view shared (amongst others) by Platonists and positivists (Popper being both, notwithstanding his own repudiation of the positivist label). This view holds that reality good knowledge (philosophy for Plato, science for positivists), stands above human life and its human, all-too-human compromises, interests, involvements, omissions and omissions. It is pure, more objective, and more authoritative. Barnes is clearly irritated by the observation of an unnamed Popperian that to do science is to "participate in the divine", or the admission of Ian Jarvie that he feels "awe at the transcendental miracle of mathematics and science". There is nothing transcendental or divine here, as far as Barnes is concerned.

Barnes has in fact revived the characteristic eighteenth-century pejorative use of the word "ontologism", and notes with marked distaste its presence among Popperians. "Few epistemologists are such enthusiasts as those of the Popperian school", and even fewer allow their enthusiasm such latitude. "The fastidious aversion of the gentleman for the nonconformist who take their religion too seriously", reappears in Barnes as an aversion to philosophers who take their science too seriously.

If it is wrong to do so, what is the truth of the matter? Science is no different from other human activities. In science as elsewhere, we make our concepts and determine the range of their application. What is here repudiated is both the Platonic vision of independent and authoritative concepts, and the positivist vision of a culture-transcending, independently valid science. Platonism salvages the ordinary world, and Barnes does indeed sound like one

of those contemporary theologians who deplore and endeavour to reverse that Augustinian opposition of flesh and spirit: there is really nothing so special about spirit, not enough to make a high song and dance about anyway, and the flesh is perfectly in order, when you come to think of it. It is a homely and human and above all a united and continuous world that we live in, freed from the tension between Sacred and Profane realms, especially in their modern form, as the opposition between science and *Lebenswelt*. It is *meaning* and *hermeneutics* which are the great levellers and universal solvents. Barnes is quite right in noting that positivism does indeed contain its own version of the old dualism, and is in this way linked to Platonism.

By what means does he overcome the hateful dualism, and does he do it successfully? The basic plot is this: the unity of the world is established by the doctrine that in all fields of activity, concepts *make* *man*: it is man, not the concepts themselves, who decides whether or not a new object falls under a given concept. This is a kind of Existentialist theory of concept-formation and object-recognition: each act of application is independent and sovereign and accountable only to itself. No pre-existent law rules over us all. Objects are made, or at any rate assigned to the descriptions which cover them, by acts of classification if not of creation. Objects arrive without labels, and the christening or labelling which follows them entry into the realm, if not of being, at any rate of intelligibility, is freely performed by individual men.

Barnes calls this doctrine (invoking Mary Hesse) "Finitism".

The core assertion is that proper usage is developed step by step, in processes involving successions of on-the-spot judgements. Every instance of use, or of proper use, of a concept must in the last analysis be accounted for separately, by reference to specific, local, contingent determinants.

This doctrine is indeed crucial. It is we who determine the range of applications of a concept, and we do it on specific, individual occasions, moved by contingent and local considerations. If this is the basic truth about us, then a proper hermeneutic sociology will reveal how we made a world without any prior given structure, and in particular, without that Big Divide between the rational on one hand, and the contingent and conventional on the other, which both Platonism and Positivism would impose on the world.

Where does Kuhn come into this? His importance does not lie in his account of those scientific revolutions which figure in the title of his best-known book. Those revolutions, like the reports of the death of Mark Twain, have been greatly exaggerated. His real significance, whether he knows it or not, is, according to Barnes, that he makes it plain that both normal and revolutionary science cannot be the work of Reason operating on Experience; but that, on the contrary, it is built upon human conventions like anything else, and we nuzzle up those conventions as we go along. So "a scientific sub-culture, with its own esoteric procedures, objectives and standards, is just like any other."

The Finitism which gives us these conclusions has a rival, which Barnes calls, a little misleadingly (given the use of these terms in logic), "Extensional Semantics". This rival view holds that "everything already lies either within or without the extension of a term". In other words that a concept, already has a delimited range of applications, and I cannot fiddle with it as I go along. The concept has a meaning (or "intension") which inheres in it; which is the concept, and it determines, not I, whether something does or does not fall under it. What is at issue is really whether concepts have powers or a life of their own, or whether they are merely animated by us. Finitism says "No, they have no life of their own: what life they seem to have, we breathe into them." We breathe them Platonism is just the illusion engendered by the life-like comportment of these ventriloquist's dummies. We speak through them, but pretend that they speak to us, even

that they order us about; and strangely enough, the pretence takes in the ventriloquists themselves, namely ourselves.

That is the Finitist doctrine. Curiously enough, it is self-refuting. Were it true, then we ourselves could freely decide when Finitism, which is itself a concept amongst others, and when its rival platonist "Extensional Semantics", are to apply to given bits of behaviour in the realm they share, i.e. the human habits of classifying things. But if the thesis of Finitism is indeed true, then we already know that Finitism will apply tomorrow and for ever, to any bit of human labelling activity. That is what Finitism says: "Extensional Semantics" are never true. But if that is true, then there is at least one case in which we do not label freely, but in which the allocation to one of two pre-established alternative categories, is decided and constrained in advance of the event, by general considerations, which demonstrate the untenability of "Extensional Semantics". So, if Finitism is true, it is false in at least one case. But Finitism claims to be true generally, so one falsification eliminates it. So, if true, it is false; so, it is false.

It is curious to note that this extreme and voluntarist nominalism generates the same paradox as does Platonism. As Aristotle already noted, if the fact that two objects belong to the same class is explained by saying that they both resemble the same idea, then the resemblance between each one of them and the idea, can in turn only be explained by one further meta-idea, and so on for ever. Similarly, if belonging to some class is explained by an act of decision or choice by the classifier, then the link between the two acts of classification similarly requires a further act of classification. ... How do we know that it is the "same" class word that has been applied to two cases? It could only have been two phonetically similar phonetic patterns which we chose contingently to group together. But similarities are never conclusive, and ever Janus-faced. Barnes uses as an epigraph a remark of Kuhn's which is also the underlying premise of his entire argument: "It is a truism that anything is similar to, and different from, anything else." In other words, the natural attitudes and oppositions of things leave us ample, perhaps total, freedom as to how we group them.

It is not surprising that this paradox should arise for nominalism as much as for Platonism. It did not arise for Platonism simply because the link it invoked for binding objects was a transcendent Idea. It arose because the premise was that any grouping must be based on some link, and that premise can then be turned upon the relation between the link and each of the linked objects. It does not matter whether the link dwells in a transcendent realm, or whether it is a human choice or convention.

Later in the book, Barnes unwittingly generates another version of the same paradox. It is perfectly in order, he insists, for us to choose and construct our conceptual system in the light of our mundane interests. The desire for liberation from earthly interests is precisely the kind of dualistic puritanism which he repudiates. He also describes, rather well,

the kind of interest which is served by a Platonic, concept-relying scheme. In fact, his account of the social uses of Platonism is one of the best things in the book, and one of the few sections containing some substantive rather than merely formal sociology. But beware: if interest-motivated styles of thought are to be permitted and encouraged, why not Platonism? We know about the Cretan who said all Cretans were liars: how about the permissive relativist who said that all forms of life are valid - including those which absolutise themselves and condemn relativism? If they are right, then his own views are wrong; but his view is that they (among others) are indeed right. ...

I don't wish to make too much of these self-referential paradoxes, which undoubtedly haunt Barnes's argument. Let him who is not guilty of making exceptions on behalf of his own ideas cast the first stone, whilst I timidly drop my pebble. I wish I could convincingly eliminate "Finitism" in more straightforward ways. (I could always pretend I cannot do it because of lack of space, but as a matter of fact it is lack of ability.) But even if Finitism were true, which I do not think it is, the really important thing for the understanding of societies and of science in particular is this: all thought may be finitistic, but some styles of thought are much more finitistic than others.

It is the differences that really matter. Even if it is true that, *sub specie aeternitatis*, nature is mute and does not dictate our categories, and we make them up, none the less what matters here and now, and particularly during the past four centuries or so, is that finitism seems to have become much less true within the one tradition which has in the end completely transformed the conditions of human life - by engendering the scientific and industrial revolutions. It is reasonable to suspect that the transformation of our cognitive and productive styles since the seventeenth century has something to do with having learnt to behave in a less "finitistic" way: the new style insists on treating like cases in a like manner, attending as far as possible only to the facts of the case, and ignoring the rich social context. In brief, there has been a marked degree of "rationalization" in our attitude to nature, and to social and economic organization. This means, above all, a diminution of that conceptual opportunism which allows the classification of things to be at the service of too many and too varied a set of social ends. So even if it were true that, in the end, we are all opportunists, because nature herself is mute and imposes no classifications herself, what really matters, for the understanding of that tremendous transformation of society which has occurred in the recent centuries, is the *diminution* of our opportunism; and the whole thrust of Barnes's argument is to make us less sensitive to this change.

The explanation or characterization of the miraculous transformation of Western society might run something like this: certain groups of people in north-west Europe began to think and act in much less "finitistic" ways. That is normal in most societies. This increased conceptual rigidity, the diminution of the old habit of zigzagging from one principle to another when applying a term,

this enhanced rule-consistency, may have been encouraged by the coming together of two influences: Great mathematics and its metaphysical echoes on the one hand, and on the other a strict utilitarian theology, with a distant and hidden God, who sets up the rules but does not then fiddle them. This God, who makes up the rules in advance, and does not invent them as He goes along, is in fact rather severely anti-finitist. He does not stoop to finitism in His own conduct, and does not encourage it amongst His creation. Anyway, all this may have led the believers to modify their cognitive and productive habits, thereby setting off that unique and unprecedented intellectual and economic growth of our society.

Of course I do not know this story to be true. It is just a very potted summary or variant of the most important of sociological theories about the emergence of the modern world, but formulated in Barnes's terms, it is significant that Max Weber is not mentioned in his book, nor is any pre-scientific tradition explored, and the nature of extreme pre-scientific thought is not discussed. As everything is so much alike, perhaps that question does not make much sense for Barnes. It has been said of a certain kind of idealist metaphysics that when it absorbed everything in the Absolute, all cows ended up exactly the same shade of grey. It is a curious fact about this kind of extreme nominalism, or the cult of ad hoc conceptual voluntarism, that it too ends up by making everything seem alike. All cows are grey again, everything is like everything, and science is like everything. But what happens if we want to understand the differences?

Barnes observes, rather late in the book that, "I am not a card-carrying ethnomethodologist, and cannot claim to be qualified to dispense its mysteries." It is good to be told, for I had been wondering - is he or isn't he? Ethnomethodology is a recent movement within sociology which pushes to the extreme limit (if not a good deal further) the insight that man himself decides how to classify, how to label things. The point of the name of the movement is this: just as, say, ethno-botany, in anthropological parlance, is the botany of the local, studied group, as opposed to our botany, so "ethnomethodology" means using and accepting the methods (of classifying, rendering intelligible) employed by the people of person we study, and not imposing our own.

As each act of labelling, made by one person on one occasion, is sovereign and not to be corrected from the outside, this leads to a bizarre science indeed. On the one hand, the subject and object of inquiry become one, flowing into each other in a blissful union in which error is no longer possible: what Absolute Idealism had only achieved for the Grand Totality, this technique achieves for each individual act. (It is not always clear whether the practitioners are describing something, or inventing and self-empowering it.) A public, orderly, law-bound world disintegrates like a shattered mirror. There is no longer any permanent, public, pre-fab world - only a multiplicity of instantaneously erected and as rapidly dismantled mini-worlds. (The theory itself is one cloud of thin air at the approach of any criticism.) This antinomianism does not simply deny the authority of rules, it denies their very possibility. The licence which this allows to the practitioners of the method is pretty near total, and the consequence of their liberation from external or logical constraints is often a kind of private gobbledygook. Conceptual drag, verbal bohemianism can go no further.

Barnes shares their crucial premise, likes their approach, endorses it at most with a qualification, and makes plain his conditional acceptance. He argues a case for a traveller's status. He argues a case which seems to me wrong, above all because it diminishes our sensitivity to the supremely important question of the origin and implication of finitism, or, if you prefer, less finitism than others, though in the modern world. But he excuses his case with coherence, lucidity, brevity, humour and modesty. (Qualities not conspicuous in the movement with which he flirts.) That is no mean achievement.

Hand Dance

They cup, or mould, or make a shadow in the full glare of a bedside lamp, fingers that travel through hair as a long journey, or close an eye preparing for a tiny death, or great. These moved instinctively together and fell instinctively to such million uses it seems a shame ever to part them. How much like each other they've become. What fine old dances they can twist and turn to. And think of all the knees trapped and freed to catch again, again in the long night which is longer than their reach or grasp, which can't be caught by hands and casts no shadow.

George Szirtes

Master of the gauchos

By Malcolm Deas

JOHN LYNCH:

Argentine Dictator

John Manuel de Rosas 1829-1852

414pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £22.50.

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At that time the portrait, in colours, of the great man occupied the post of honour above the mantelpiece in our sala, or drawing-room - the picture of a man with fine clear-cut regular features, light reddish-brown hair and side-whiskers, and blue eyes; he was sometimes called "Englishman" on account of his regular features and blond complexion. That picture of a stern handsome face, with flings and cannon and olive-branch - the arms of the republic - in its heavy gold frame, was one of the principal ornaments of the room, and my father was proud of it, since he was, for reasons to be stated by and by, a great admirer of Rosas, an out and out Rosista, as the loyal ones were called.

Thus W. H. Hudson remembered Juan Manuel de Rosas in his account of his Argentine childhood in the 1840s. *Far Away and Long Ago*, Hudson's portrait in colours, hitherto the only one likely to be encountered by the literate Englishman, is now joined by John Lynch's biography, the most handsome and complete in any language. It is a worthy successor to H. S. Ferns's *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century*, and it is fitting that an Englishman should have written it. General Rosas, despite the Falkland Islands and the Anglo-French blockade of 1845-47, was never anti-British. His horse was called Victoria, after our Queen. During the blockade, the British envoy Lord Howden reported back that "General Rosas offered me to supply the blockading squadron daily with fresh beef, bread and vegetables". "Inefficient as the blockade is," he added, "there appeared to me something too infinitely ludicrous in such a proposition to allow me to accept it." Rosas lived twenty-five years in exile in England, most of them as a tenant farmer at Burgess Street Farm, Swaythling, and he is buried in Southampton cemetery. In old age his opinions would have caused little stir in Hampshire. Tory circles, he had been admitted to them, apart from an eccentric notion that Prince Alice would have made an ideal ruler for Argentina. The "Tiger of Palermo" was put out to grass in 400 rented acres and forgotten. He was, then, as Professor Lynch says, "of no political or social consequence".

He had neglected to feather a nest abroad during his years of power: his friends did not send him ulcers, for his enemies left him alone. He kept only one Argentine manservant, and an English housekeeper. He recommended avoiding marriage because he liked writing rambling letters, or reading, in bed.

He had been the most notorious of the early rulers of independent Spanish America. Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires with the *suma del poder publico*, the most absolute power, from 1829 to 1852, and the most powerful figure in Argentina and the River Plate. He was not a remote curiosity like the Paraguayan Dr. Francia, nor was his power intermittent like that of the Mexican Santa Anna. His conflicts with other provinces, with Uruguay and with France and Britain, his political methods and particularly his use of terror, the scale of his rural operations and his long dominance gave him a singular fame in the rest of Latin America and in Europe which makes the obscurity of his exile the more surprising. His reputation was revived when in the 1930s the cosmopolitan Argentina of the generation of *los gauchos* appeared to falter and a new nationalist crisis who con-structed a nationalist Rosas for their own ends. Lynch's dispassionate biography does not send him ulcers, for he does make a thorough attempt to place the man in his context.

"Juan Manuel de Rosas, landowner, rural caudillo ...", so he begins. Rosas came of a good Buenos Aires family, ran away at an early age and went into the business of running estancias, in partnership with his supremely well-landed cousins, the Anchorenas. Rosas was not a gaucho, but a master of gauchos. He liked to show off his horsemanship and his understanding of everything rural, and this was certainly politically useful, and in his first taking power even critical. It has, however, led to much excessive "telluric" writing about his earthiness and his intimate rapport with the rural inhabitants of the province, as if this was the essence of his ascendancy. His immediate peers may have appreciated his horsemanship and his horse sense, but his bumptiousness in the saddle, and some gaucho elements in his army stayed loyal to the end, but he was a laird and meticulous task-master. He wrote a detailed account of estancia management too - *Instrucciones a los propietarios de estancias*. He represented estancieros, however much he occasionally flattered gauchos. His recruiting parties, his *jueces de paz*, his orders to flog and to shoot were not part of any ruralist mystique. It is true that Rosas and his associates owned enormous tracts of land, that he controlled a fair proportion of the rural labour force directly, and the rest of it indirectly through the militia and allied landowners, and that this brought him to power in 1829. Once he was in power it still mattered, but it mattered less.

"Rural caudillo", so near the beginning of Lynch's account, does lead one to suspect that he has in part prejudged his subject. Rosas was certainly far from being entirely rural. He was not a native of rural Buenos Aires, nor did he ever place exclusive reliance on rural political forces. For much of his time in power he does not seem to have led a rural sort of life: as his nephew Lucio Mansilla wrote, "sólo montó a caballo para cazar" - "he only got on his horse for his fall". He spent months on end dictating to numerous clerks in his house in Palermo. He had an indiscriminate appetite for government business and a calculated inability to delegate that reminds one of the Emperor Franz Joseph, milder than any other South American. Hides, salt-beef, sheep and corn were the province's chief business, and Rosas was interested in them all. It would be as accurate to label him a "business caudillo", but that would not cause the same *fissura*, *Argentine Dictator*, perhaps obeying a subconscious urge to preserve its subject's atavism, concedes that he was businesslike but criticizes him for not having introduced any new "technology", for not taking much interest in new breeds, "for managing by instinct, not theory. There is a quotation from the arch-critic Domingo Faustino Sarmiento: 'Cows dictate Argentine policy! What are Rosas, Quiroga and Urquiza? Cowboys, nothing more.' The evidence rather shows that Rosas methodically explored new opportunities, and that method, as he applied it, was the most effective new technology of the time. He raised sheep and grew corn, and his avoidance of more progressive agricultural experiment looks like sound common sense. He was certainly better informed on these matters than either Sarmiento or Professor Lynch.

Caudillo causes a *fissura* all by itself, and for this Sarmiento's *Civilization and Barbarism* is the life of terror. Rosas's ferocious ally Juan Pascundo Quiroga, is more responsible than any other work. The trouble with the term is that it just means leader, and it has been used in Argentina and in the rest of the hispanic world of a great many different types. Apart from conveying in most cases a vague sense of personal attraction, it is a term of precise political description. For Rosas's contemporary and opponent General José María Paz, Rosas was not the prototype caudillo, or even a typical caudillo. The first distinction he reserved for the Uruguayan José Artigas' typical caudillo

he considered lesser men like Estanislao López of Santa Fé, Juan Felipe Ibarra of Santiago del Estero, or Fructuoso Rivera, another Uruguayan. In Paz's *Memorias Positivas* these are the men who summon up hordes of irregular cavalry, who are absolute masters for a time of their provinces, who embodied "the spirit of democracy that was abroad everywhere". For Paz, a lucid and patriotic professional soldier, what ultimately characterized them all was their limitations and their sterility. They looked fierce, but their stance was essentially defensive: they wanted to be left alone. "If the San-

irritated because he believes I cannot understand them, because to do so I would have to sink to depths I can't reach. Both gauchos [not a word of praise at all in Paz's vocabulary]; both tyrants; both indifferent to the sufferings of humanity, but the one working on the grand scale, and the other limited to a sphere as reduced as his own education and ambitions. Rosas goes straight to the point. López goes round about and by back-streets. Rosas has eighty Indians shot in Buenos Aires in a single day. López has their throats cut one by one, by



"General" Eusebio, Rosas's court jester (Wilson W. H. Hudson once saw), mounted on his master. A caricature by Rafael Mendes de Carvalho, 1851.

tingo gauchos are content with him", he wrote of Ibarra.

It is because he lets them vegetate in their stupidity. It is held to be a great recommendation of him that his province has never sent any recruits to the national armies. He called that "selling his countrymen" and so the Santiagueños think they are free because since Ibarra has ruled them they have done nothing for liberty.

Paz was captured by López, and describes him as "a gaucho in all the extension of the word, sullen, silent, suspicious, shrewd, lazy and untrustworthy. He did not appear to be cruel, but he was certainly not sensitive; he did not enjoy spilling blood, but he watched it flow unawakened; he did not excite the people unreasonably, but neither did he repress disorders; he had his own way of going about things when he had to stop them. 'Don't speak to me of improvements,' he told Paz, 'prosluita I found this province and prosluita I will leave it.'

It is a weakness of Professor Lynch's analysis, excusable enough in the face of the extraordinary complexity of Argentine and River Plate politics at this time, that he has chosen to confine his attention to the Province of Buenos Aires, and that consequently he does not sufficiently make Rosas's originality and superiority. General Paz compared López and Rosas at length, after eight years in captivity under first one and then the other:

one, Rosas, sent me books; it never occurred to the other that I might need them. The former lets me know his intentions frankly; the latter, by a taciturn and secretive, wants me to guess them, and gets

night in an out-of-the-way place. Rosas wishes to be taken as on educated man, but lets it also be seen that the forms of civilization are no obstacles to him; López rebels against society whenever it shows him that it has ceased to be a form of pressure; people were compelled to conform. This took the place of orthodoxy tests, security clearances, oaths of allegiance. Federal uniformity was a measure of quasi-totalitarian coercion, by which people were forced to abandon a passive or apolitical role and to adopt a specific commitment, to show their true colours. Moreover it was not voluntary. It was imposed by force and could easily become an instrument of terror.

His chapters on Rosas's methods of government and on the terror are admirable. Terror was not spontaneous or random; it varied in intensity but it was always present. It was, as he says, "extraordinary even by the standards of the time", and though something to be feared, it was not something to be feared in which throats were cut and few prisoners taken, the application of *vicio y virtud* (a euphemism for throat-cutting that Pedro de Angelis regretted that his brother, an Italian bishop, would not understand) to opponents or suspected opponents in Buenos Aires, at night, by the members of the *Sociedad Popular Restauradora* known as the *mazorca*; their beatings-up and enema-applications made Rosas famous outside his own country. The famous escape narrative, *La cautividad*, may indeed have been all hard to do so. In his raptures here too one does detect an individuality that is not altogether sane.

You have known me for many years, but I have not told you for this

looked as if he was not quite right in the head. His power also rested on a disciplined army, and much more on that as time passed than on any resort to the militia, let alone a *mazorca*. In church affairs he was fond of clerical flattery, and most of the church obliged; he distrusted the Pope and the Jesuits. He paid his own journalists, among them Pedro de Angelis, a Neapolitan who had formerly been tutor to the children of Murat - he edited a line section on the history of the River Plate and was an able propagandist. In finance Rosas believed in the inevitability of paper money, which inflated quietly away and which everyone got used to, and in the customs revenue. He disliked ideologues; many went to Montevideo.

His notoriety did not derive from any of this, but from terror and its instruments, uniformity and the *mazorca*. In the Argentine National Historical Museum in Luján one can see preserved the emblems of the Federation, the ribbons that read *Federación o muerte - mueran los salvajes indios*, and the scarlet waistcoats. The *chaleco punzó* that was worn by the Federalists. Among the dinosaur-sized carriages, the ex-carts of the old pampas, is Rosas's blood-coloured carriage. There had been nothing like all this in Europe for some time, and there was not going to be anything like it for some time: there was nothing much like it in the rest of the Americas either. Rosas was, indeed, obsessive. He himself told a British Minister, Henry Southey, that "there is not a member of his family who is not *unmilitado*". He went to extraordinary lengths:

It may appear ridiculous in the latitude of London to request the Barings not to write to the Governor on blue or bluish paper. The fact, however, is that he never wrote, and never will read as long as he lives any thing whatever written on blue paper. On the other hand if the sheets are tacked together by a bit of red ribbon, he would be more gratified by the absurd piece of homage than if the Barings had made him a large loan.

He did not want a large loan, and there was reason as well as obsession in this insistence on the Federal style, as Professor Lynch writes:

The official explanation of all this extravagance was that ... it was a sign of unity and loyalty; it enabled activists to identify friends at a glance; it was even a law of amnesty. There was some truth in this, but it was not the whole truth. The Federal symbolism was a form of pressure; people were compelled to conform. This took the place of orthodoxy tests, security clearances, oaths of allegiance. Federal uniformity was a measure of quasi-totalitarian coercion, by which people were forced to abandon a passive or apolitical role and to adopt a specific commitment, to show their true colours. Moreover it was not voluntary. It was imposed by force and could easily become an instrument of terror.

His chapters on Rosas's methods of government and on the terror are admirable. Terror was not spontaneous or random; it varied in intensity but it was always present. It was, as he says, "extraordinary even by the standards of the time", and though something to be feared, it was not something to be feared in which throats were cut and few prisoners taken, the application of *vicio y virtud* (a euphemism for throat-cutting that Pedro de Angelis regretted that his brother, an Italian bishop, would not understand) to opponents or suspected opponents in Buenos Aires, at night, by the members of the *Sociedad Popular Restauradora* known as the *mazorca*; their beatings-up and enema-applications made Rosas famous outside his own country. The famous escape narrative, *La cautividad*, may indeed have been all hard to do so. In his raptures here too one does detect an individuality that is not altogether sane.

You have known me for many years, but I have not told you for this

bloodthirsty, and I have proved this during the time of my government. When in my position would have been so economical in shedding blood? And whose have I shed? Not a drop apart from what may be considered normal routine. To order this or that villain to be shot is common in all parts of the world and passes without notice, for society could not survive otherwise.

Camila O'Gorman, eight months pregnant, was shot on his direct orders for running away with a priest.

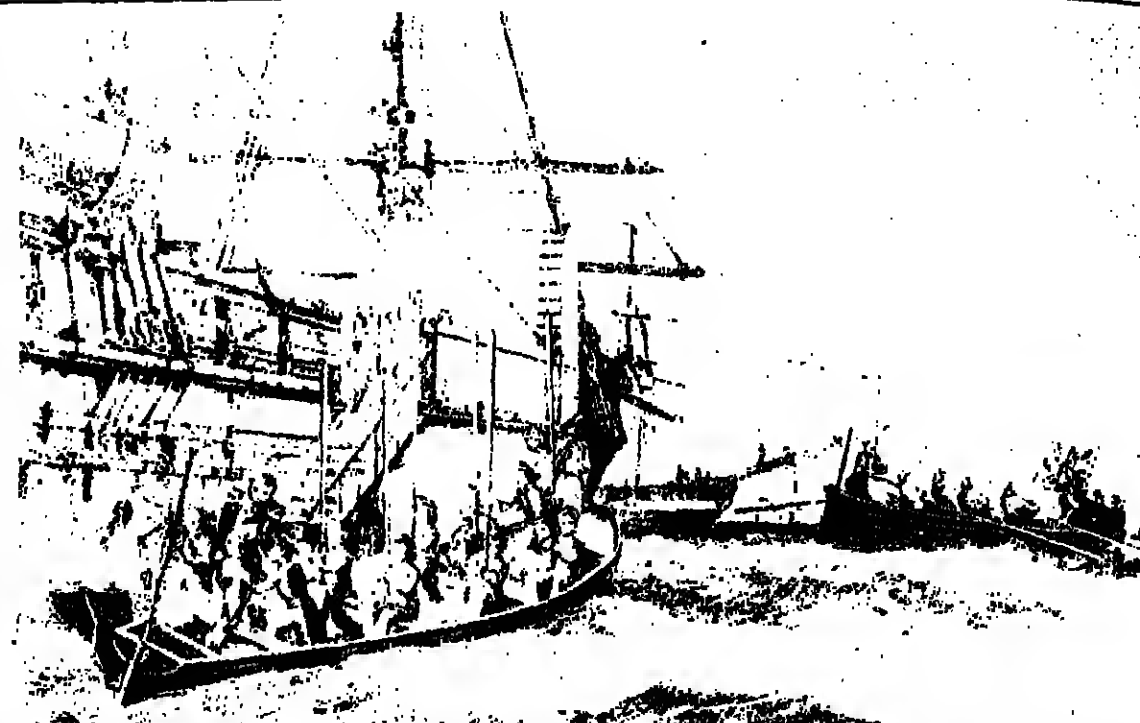
A large measure of self-deception was part of his character, and when he was in power this did not take such harmless forms as his phantom exile friendship with Palmerston. There are two further elements in a possible explanation of the terror to add in John Lynch's account. The first he denies himself the chance to explore fully by opening his main narrative in 1829, when Rosas took power. What occurred between 1806 and 1820 made Rosas seem necessary, gave him his usual justifications, made his methods the more tolerable. The continued *Unirio* threat, whether from the provinces or from Uruguay, the deaths of Quiroga and other allies, kept memories of anarchy fresh. Rosas was the best bet for order, an argument frequently used by Anglo-Saxons, such as Hudson's father:

Quite naturally I followed my father and came to believe that all the bloodshed during a quarter of a century, all the crimes and cruelties practised by Rosas, were not like the crimes committed by a private person, but were all for the good of the country, with the result that in Buenos Ayres and throughout our province there had been a long period of peace and prosperity.

The second, related, element is the "spirit of democracy" mentioned by General Paz. Argentine Dictator is not always clear in the impression it gives of Argentine society at this time. Professor Lynch writes that "the polarization of society was absolute... an immense gulf separated the landed proprietor from the landless poor." But on the same page he qualifies this view, and quotes an

observation that many landowners live "in precisely the same manner as the labourer does". General Paz would have agreed that society had been polarized: "it was very easy for the caudillos to raise the ignorant against the educated, the poor against the rich, and this hatred came to be confused with jealousies which were inspired by the preponderance of Buenos Aires." But he would probably have seen some truth in Rosas's repeated assertions that he had to govern in a democratic spirit: "There is no aristocracy here to support a government, public opinion and the masses govern." This was at least half true. There was no effective aristocracy. The Rio de la Plata was not an aristocratic part of the Spanish Empire. Rosas did not emerge from a rigidly stratified society nor did he leave such a society behind him. He himself wrote that he came to power he saw society "in a state of utter dissolution" the inevitable time had arrived when it was necessary to exercise personal influence on the masses to re-establish order, security and laws. He saw himself as using demagogic means in a conservative cause.

Rosas was supplanted by Justo José de Urquiza, caudillo of the rich littoral province of Entre Ríos, who was supported by Brazil. There was no significant movement against him in his own province, but the balance of power in the State had altered, and his defenses and his diplomacy were out of date. After such years of discipline there could be no spontaneous movement in his favour. His title of "Restorer of the Laws", his institutional legacy to his country was negligible, as Professor Lynch points out. "To organize the country is to disturb it", was how he put it himself. He gave a large part of it a score of years of relative peace, in which it moderately prospered. With foreign powers he was successfully awkward. There was about him, as Paz conceded, a grand scale, but also, as Paz implied, no real grandeur of character or conception. After his fall from power he kept up with Argentine news, but his obsessions and hatreds seem to have left him: he was the tenant of Burgess Street Farm, where he introduced the pumpkin to the neighbourhood.



Rosas with his son and daughter and a small retinue boarding the English frigate *Cannir* in February 1852, en route for London.

Mettlesome matriarch

By David Mitchell

LYNNE WITHEY
Dearest Fyled
A Life of Abigail Adams
369pp. Collier Macmillan. £12.95.
0 02 934760 2

"There is nothing so odious as a lady at sea... it is impossible to preserve a sense of delicacy," said John Adams, a Boston lawyer turned politician, to his wife Abigail in 1779; and when he sailed for Europe he left her behind to look after the farm. Lynne Withey insists that the couple suffered from their long separations as John advanced from the Massachusetts Legislature to the Continental Congress, later becoming

one of the Commissioners to France and ambassador to Great Britain. But one feels that despite a perhaps because of her steely competence and fierce ambition for her husband, absence from Abigail Adams made his heart grow appreciably fonder.

Progressing from a rustic cottage to palatial residences in Paris and London, queening it as the United States' second First Lady and mother of the nation's first great political dynasty (her son John Quincy became President in 1824), Abigail resisted the lures of foreign sophistication and preserved her puritan bourgeois values. Born in 1744, the daughter of a Congregational minister in Weymouth, Massachusetts, she had no formal education - most girls of her background were considered accomplished if they could read the Bible and write an occasional letter - but was exceptional in that her father, a Harvard graduate, encouraged her to read widely and to think for herself.

As the break with the mother country drew near, she suggested that the struggle for independence would be incomplete if it did not include some recognition of the rights of women, and when she arranged for their daughter to study Latin, her husband begged her to keep quiet about it. In a coupling of themes which by the 1840s was central to suffragist polemic she remarked (as, very forcefully, did Dr Johnson) that black slaves and white freedmen rhetoric were ill assorted; and in 1776 told John Adams that "whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over Wives."

Later she grumbled that "if you complain of education in sons, what shall I say of daughters who every day experience the want of it? If we mean to have heroes, statesmen and philosophers, we should have [learned women]."

She could claim some credit for the establishment of the first secondary schools in America, but firmly believed in separate spheres for the sexes. A well-read, well-informed wife would, she reasoned, be a pleasing companion to the man of science and of sensibility, enabled to form the minds of her children to virtue and knowledge, and not less capable or willing to superintend the domestic economy of her family for having wandered beyond the limits of the dressing room and the kitchen.

Yet she could be an embarrassing, opinionated, unsubmissive helpmeet. Indignant at differences of opinion about "tyrant" England (why couldn't all Americans be like the militants of Massachusetts, bluffed as the Marquis de Lafayette? "America is like a large fleet sailing under command," she wrote in 1777, "the vessel is the people, the sails are the laws, and the helm is the government. It is not to be steered by a few men, but by the will of the people.")

"Instead of supplications... let us beseech the almighty to blast their counsels and bring to nought their devices."

En route to join John Adams in Paris in 1794 she bullied the crew to clean the ship - "I soon exerted my Authority with scraps of mops and brushes, infusions of vinegar etc." - and taught the galley cook "how to dress his victuals". In Paris she was shocked by the licentious behaviour of Benjamin Franklin's female guests and characterized France as "a country grown old in Debauchery". London she found more congenial, though deploring the "despotic sway" of fashion, court flummery, the outrageous cost of ambassadorial hospitality, and the distasteful monotony of Shakespeare's plays (how could a nice woman like Sarah Siddons take part in such productions?). But, sensitive to English taunts - "they twist us of being descended from the refuse of their Gods" - she triumphantly traced "an ancestor amongst the signers of Magna Carta" and hotly backed the efforts of George Washington ("George I") as his egalitarian critics and John Adams (caricatured as "His Rotundity") to dignify the fledgling republic with suitably impressive titles and ceremonial.

In the quarrel between Federalists and Republicans she vehemently favoured strong central government, and after the Jacobin Terror in France became a rabid conservative who would have agreed with Alexander Hamilton that "democracy is our real disease". Of what use were frequent elections, party strife, and the impudence of an uncontrolled press (Republican sheets accused her husband, when President, of plotting to marry his son to a reuniting America and England), except to "corrupt and destroy the morals of the people" and sabotage the efforts of those who know best?

When Thomas Jefferson won the presidential election of 1800 Abigail, now a former First Lady, predicted dire consequences from the government of an "infidel" who would make the United States appear "false, treacherous and Revolutionary". But she mellowed sufficiently to announce, not long before her death in 1817: "I am determined to be very well pleased with the world and wish well to all its inhabitants." From her voluminous correspondence Lynne Withey has constructed an informative rather pedestrian biography of a mettlesome, middle-class matriarch who, as she put it when describing her reign of hygiene and terror on that suitably named ship, the *Active*, usually confined to "reign Mistress on Board".

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FICTION

Making holes in the walls

By Gabriel Josipovici

GÜNTER GRASS:
Headbirths, or The Germans are Dying Out
Translated by Ralph Manheim
130pp. Secker and Warburg. £6.95.
0 436 18777 9

Günter Grass goes from strength to strength. Like his almost exact contemporary, Stockhausen, he becomes, with each new work, at once more German and more international, more personal and more universal. His last book, *The Meeting at Telgte*, was dedicated to Hans Werner Richter, the founder of Group 47, and it told of the coming together of German writers from all corners of the Empire after the devastations of the Thirty Years' War. There was no need to make explicit the parallel between 1647 and 1947; Grass let the analogy speak for itself and devoted his energies to conveying the sense of a Europe exhausted and all but destroyed by war, and bringing to life a whole host of minor and largely forgotten German writers of the seventeenth century. But just because (in less than 150 pages) he succeeded so well in evoking particular artists at a particular time, the book was able to convey something about the relation of art to the realities of life at all times, everywhere. Writers, unlike businessmen and politicians, are free spirits, owing allegiance only to the truth, anxious only to emulate their great predecessors; but they are also more prone than most men to vanity, sloth, lechery and cowardice. They have very little power to change reality, and yet it is only by recognizing their weaknesses and limitations that they may, perhaps, change it, even if ever so slightly.

Headbirths, also among the shortest novels Grass has written, is again dedicated to a writer, Nicolas Born, his younger contemporary, dying of cancer as the book begins and dead by the time it ends. It too takes as its central theme the responsibility of the writer to make holes in all the walls men build: walls around their countries, as in China; through the middle of their countries, as in Ger-

many; around places they don't want to examine too closely, such as nuclear installations; and around themselves. Grass has no time for those, like Rudolph Dutschke, who have, as he puts it, "a faith that refuses to be put off by reality", but it is a measure of the complexity of this short book, and of its refusal to settle down comfortably in any one attitude, that Grass also gives a moving account of Dutschke's death (he drowned in his bath during an epileptic fit brought on by the attempt on his life years earlier). For Grass, though, the writer's task is not to project apocalypses but to use his imagination in the service of reality, not to mythologize, as some much-praised English and American writers, drunk on the irresponsible power of the imagination, seem to think, but, on the contrary, to demythologize. What if I had been born in 1917 and not 1927? Grass asks. How would I have acted under the Nazis? What if down in South-East Asia there were only eighty million Chinese but here in the heart of Europe there were close on a billion Germans? It is the writer's function to raise these questions, to ask us to consider alternative realities, not so that we may lose ourselves in them, but so that we may recognize important facts about the reality we have; that it is the product of specific choices and decisions at specific times by specific people; that we can make other choices than the ones that appear to be forced upon us, if we so choose.

Headbirths was sparked off by a lecture four Grass was invited to undertake in China, with Volker Schlöndorff, the maker of the film *The Tin Drum*. In England we are used to novelists who are stuck for a subject for their next novel getting their publishers to finance a trip to some exotic region and then "writing it up". This form of journalism seems to be more popular with reviewers and the book-buying public than works of fiction (after all, it deals with reality and novels are, in the end, only inventions, aren't they?), so publishers are pleased to pay up. Grass's book is not of this kind. As with Stockhausen, the very modest sense of abrupt movement from one civilization to another has called forth from him a corresponding movement of the imagination.

Back home the 1980 German elections are looming, and Grass, despite his differences with Helmut Schmidt, remains committed to the Social Democrats and their party leader, Willy Brandt, and an implacable enemy of the Christian Democrats and in particular their head, Franz Josef Strauss. *Headbirths* explores the images and ideas which the simultaneous exposure to China and the German elections set off in Grass's mind.

The book is about Grass and Schlöndorff and their wives on the lecture tour of China; it is about a film the two men are planning, which will deal with two once-radical and now liberal school teachers who cannot make up their minds to have children (Can one really bring children into the present-day world? "I couldn't let a child of mine be born into a Germany headed by Strauss, let's wait till after the elections..."), and who undertake a trip to India and Malaysia under the aegis of the travel firm Sisyphus, a firm which promises holidays with a difference - for with them the specially concerned can, for small extra payments, spend a night or two in the slums of Calcutta, visit refugee camps, and generally subject themselves to a sample of the miseries of the Third World; it is about Nicolas Born; about Grass himself, a novelist at the crossroads in his fifty-second year; about the two Germans; about all German writers, past and present; about writing itself and its ambiguous relations with the powers that be.

One can imagine what the projected film, for example, might become in the hands of a Waugh or an Amis; Grass never allows himself the luxury of simple satire for the sake of laughs, nor does he imagine that he is himself so completely in possession of the truth that he can be complacent about the follies of others. He has enough in common with his two schoolteachers not to be content simply to laugh at them, ridiculous though they are - but then, Grass insists, we are all ridiculous, and our only hope is to remain alive to the complexities of the world. That is really what the book is about. Grass comments disparagingly on reviewers who praised his large novels for throwing light upon the past but

found no good to say about the collection of election speeches in which he tried to deal with the present and the future. Be a good boy, they seemed to be telling him, stick to the role of novelist and illuminate the past for us; as for the present, keep off it. As if in answer to this, Grass has, in his last two books, made past and present simultaneously alive, first with the single image of the meeting at Telgte, and now with the multiple small images he calls headbirths.

A headbirth is a symbol of sterility; perhaps it is all the Germans are now good for. Any group that starts to worry about whether or not to have children is on its way to extinction. And this might be no bad thing, Grass suggests. After all, the Romans had their day and then disappeared. Why not the Germans? At the same time a headbirth is an imaginative projection: What if there were two ex-radical school teachers and they were to go off on an Asian holiday in search of reality? What if I had been born ten years earlier? What if Germany were not divided? What if we had as many Germans in the middle of Europe as there are Chinese in China? This is Kierkegaard contra Hegel. It is not the patterns of history that are important, but the moment when Cromwell or Napoleon or Abraham or you or I decide to go this way rather than that. Join me, Grass seems to be saying, let us try this out, and then this, and then this. How does the world look now?

But once again the ambiguities surface. Is Grass on the defensive or the offensive? In his encounters with the Chinese he finds that he and they have unexpected ground in common. For the Chinese have just come out of their Cultural Revolution, they feel they have to learn to read and write all over again, to rediscover

who and what they are after a decade of distortion and falsification. And we, says Grass, who stayed behind and lived through the Nazi years inside Germany, how can we live up to the heritage of the great émigré writers, Mann and Brecht? They were classics in their lifetime; we, however, can only stammer.

He does not say: After Hitler only silence is possible. That too would be mythologizing, giving in to the Hitler rhetoric. Stammering is the truer, more exact, more imaginative word. And Grass books, we could say, are all stammers: false starts, hesitations, haunted by the inability to move forward, to round out the sentence, the paragraph, the work. But, like the greatest artists, he has made a strength out of weakness. Grass writes:

"We've learned in school that the present comes after the past and is followed by the future. But I work with a fourth tense, the past present. That's why my form gets untidy. On my paper more is possible. Here only chaos foment order. Here even holes are contents."

In the large novels such remarks somehow convey an off-putting self-confidence; in both *The Meeting at Telgte* and *Headbirths* they are the signs of Grass's humility, of his concern with how things are, and of a new simplicity at the heart of complexity. Grass seems to have found a way of bridging the gap between a private manic inventiveness and a commitment to the complex realities of the world, between *The Tin Drum* and *From the Diary of a Snail*. Artists cannot pull down the walls men build, but they can make holes in them. In *Headbirths*, as in *The Meeting at Telgte*, Grass does not merely tell us this; he shows us how it can be done. It is an exhilarating performance.

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Secker & Warburg

The heritage and the hive

By Alan Brownjohn

PENELOPE LIVELY:
Next to Nature, Art
180pp. Heinemann. £6.95.
434 42739 X

In her last novel, *Judgement Day*, Penelope Lively took some intelligent soundings on life in the 1970s from the standpoint of a developing commuter village in the English heartlands. The scale was small, but the observation was precise, the view broad and compassionate. With her new book, *Next to Nature, Art*, we are back in 1974, when - and the sentiment suggests the ironic frame for this useful little saga - "creativity is rated high".

The setting now is even narrower than the several houses around the village green; one large house only, Framleigh Hall, to which come a representative set of near-middle class people, united in a bewildered longing to fulfil themselves through self-expression. The last of the opportunistic dynasty of the Standishes, Toby Standish, has turned the Hall into the Framleigh Creative Study Centre, and the novel is about one characteristically dreadful residential course.

Miss Lively has discerned something not frequently noticed in the English character, which is commonly assumed to be entirely philistine and scornful about artists. She knows which the more than a little envious; and that one form which envy can take when in contact with

artists themselves is an uneasy deference. The achievement of her novel is to show that people may be fooled for longer than they would believe. Yet there is something disappointingly blunt-edged about her satire. Artistic pretension often comes in subtler and more plausible guises than Miss Lively implies; and the motives of aspiring artists may, on the other hand, be more honourable than she imagines. Her broad brushstrokes make *Next to Nature, Art* a curiously haughty tale.

The "Faculty" of the Centre are Toby Standish, who is a painter of sorts, Nick the ex-art student, Paula the sculptor (creator of "Introspective Woman" from bicycle-frames and fruit-netting); Greg, the poet and Bob the potter (who runs a profitable sideline in love jugs). But what ever sincere hopes Toby may have had for his creative hive in the devalued state home of his ancestors (the great pictures and statues have long since been sold off) have faded in cynicism. Toby is now covertly engaged in trying to persuade a bank to buy Framleigh as a training centre for its employees.

All that happens there is the proping up of mediocre egos among the depressing staff, a process in which the paying course members, the "ordinary people" - teacher, housewife, receptionist, research chemist - gladly acquiesce. High art may have created Framleigh Hall in the 1940s, surrounding it with an elegant landscape, but the last of the Standishes and the last of the Standishes and his gang of charlatans is peddling in 1974 in the effort to keep it going.

The targets are easy to set up, and Miss Lively hits them easily. Greg conducts sessions of verbal free-association in front of a camera while the research chemist revels in creativity and wonders how he could have let his life go so sadly, uncreatively astray. There is a very little interlude where a genuinely talented writer arrives to give a talk, and is patronized and insulted: the moral and physical chaos here is nicely spelt out. Among the cynical "artists", the awful Paula is a vivid emblem of dangerous, narcissistic self-delusion, while among the ordinary people Mary, respectable suburban mother of three, emerges as the most convincing in her groping humanity.

Sadly, what Miss Lively has Mary articulate is itself almost cynical: "creating, if only there was some other word for it because that one doesn't much mean anything any more." The ending of the novel suggests that the danger of these uneducated puppets will continue while a heritage wastes away. *Next to Nature, Art* offers some shrewd comments on one interesting thread in the fabric of current English life; but the vehicle for them is this time rather crudely constructed; and they support a world-weary little message.

The first issue of *The Fiction Magazine* (Volume 1, Number 1: Spring 1982, 64pp., £1.25) is now available, and includes stories by Frederic Raphael, Alan Sillitoe, Allen Maesie and A. L. Barker; the first chapter of a forthcoming novel by Leon Garfield; a profile of the novelist Kazuo Ishiguro; and articles by Paul Barker, Gillian Tindall and John Rowe Townsend.

In the far-off region

By Victoria Glendinning

EDNA O'BRIEN:
Returning
158pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£6.50.
0 297 78052 2

In her new collection of nine stories, some of which first appeared in the *New Yorker*, Edna O'Brien returns to her native Ireland, to the Ireland of her childhood. There is no connecting narrative link between the "tales," but the child is the same child throughout, a small farmer's daughter in a frugal, narrow community where nothing happened except ploughing, planting and harvesting, where "none of the women wore cosmetics and in the local chemist shop the jars of cold cream and vanishing cream used to go dry because of no demand."

Other shops did better; in "Courtship," handsome Michael and his brothers run the grocery shop, which also stocked "animal feed, serge for suits, winecette, cotton, paraffin, cokes, confectionery, boots, wellingtons, and cable-knit sweaters that were made by spinsters and lonely women in the mountains." Also pink corsets and, in the back, pints of porter. Not many of the local boys were as desirable as Michael; a new curate or bank clerk or creamery manager had an inflated sexual value in this shut-off rural world where Gort and Limerick were big places and Dublin a metropolis only to be dreamed of.

Because of the cooling discipline of the child's eye-view, *Returning* is steeped of the over-fluent lyric keening that has sometimes made Edna O'Brien's writing dangerously like a parody of itself. But even in this tauter version, there is much to be learnt from her language by anyone interested in Irish-English, which, in-

tonian apart, has its own vocabulary and sentence structures — presumably deriving in part from long-ago adaptations of Gaelic, and in part (which sometimes gives an odd impression of stilted gentility) from English words or phrases that have fallen out of common usage in England.

Edna O'Brien also has words for country things and everyday gestures that are unfamiliar to English ears, and some that sound rather exotic — whimsical Mrs Morgan "had a figari to buy an egg-timer," for example. Is a figari an Irish vagary? It has to be said that sometimes the syntax is a little awkward by anybody's standards, and that one of the best of the exotic words — pretty Nancy puts a lock of the new curate's hair into "a little lavender that she wore round her neck" — turns out to be a misprint for *lavallere*.

There is a double vision in these tales: the adult that the child will become says from time to time what she can see from her greater distance. In "The Connor Girls," about a family whose proud but faded Protestantism makes them alien, the narrator flashes forward to show how the child-self, when she marries out of the community, will become equally alien. "I realized that by choosing this world I had said goodbye to my own and to those in it. By such choices we gradually become exiles, until at last we are quite alone." Elsewhere she describes the life of a child who infiltrates the rest of life.

The years go by and everything and everyone gets replaced. Those we knew, though absent, are yet merged inextricably into the new folk so that each person is to us a sum of many others and the effect is of opening boxes after boxes in which the original is forever hidden.

The "original," in *Returning*, is as likely to be malicious or sinister as to be loved or loving. With all the people from her past forever "en-

tailed" in her, the child already knows she will, in the end, go away. She never loses "the desire to escape or the strenuous habit of hoping." Having escaped, there is the desire for return — only possible in imagination — to that "far-off region of childhood, where nothing ever dies, not even oneself."

The authenticity of her return seems proven by the way this book reminds you of aspects of childhood that are instantly recognizable, though hitherto forgotten; for example, the little subterfuges made to conceal illicit intentions. In "My Mother's Mother" the child, staying with her grandparents and aunt, plans secretly to run away back to her home. "I told my aunt I was going on a picnic and affected to be very lumpy by humming and doing little reels." This has a pathetic ring of remembered truth. This story is also good on the passionate way a child focuses on food, in this case fresh home-made bread "dolloped with butter and greenage jam." In the same story the child is given a present of a toy watch on a bead bracelet, and in describing it, Edna O'Brien again establishes the attentive close-up focus peculiar to children.

There are some childish spyings on adult sex, and a few predictably depressing glimpses from desperate country schoolgirls; but in the last story, a story of first love, the loved one is a nun in the convent where the girl is now a boarder. This is the best shaped of all the pieces here, not overwritten, told with an air of slight bewilderment and no overtones of adult knowledge.

The rebellious schoolfriend Baba is in "Sister Imelda" too, thus linking the end of this book with the earlier of Edna O'Brien's novels. In the years between, her fiction has, on the evidence of this volume, gained in hardness and truthfulness, which generally means saying less rather than more; for as she writes at the end of "Sister Imelda," "in our deepest moments we say the most inadequate things." Oddly, this book about childhood is probably the least childlike fiction that Edna O'Brien has written.

Fantastic flushes

By Adam Mars-Jones

CYNTHIA OZICK:
Levitation
158pp. Secker and Warburg. £6.95.
0 436 35482 4

"You have no feelings," one character accuses another in one of Cynthia Ozick's new stories, but the accusation is immediately modified: "he meant that she had the habit of flushing with ideas as if they were passions." And the whole book flushes likewise, with passionate learning and with passionate phrasing. Cynthia Ozick is a woman, and Jewish, and a New Yorker; these conditions in combination might be expected to produce a narrow art, if any at all. And certainly there are few men in these stories, fewer gossies, and hardly a single out-of-towner, but the result is anything but narrow; the absentees are hardly noticed.

Cynthia Ozick has the enviable knack of moving, with impressive speed, in opposite directions at the same time: her specialties are prose poetry, intellectual slapstick, meticulous detail, and wild rhetorical fantasy. The result of this best is an audacious and unorthodox balancing of forces, both within the story and within the sentence. Within the story, there is tension between a carefully rendered milieu and the wildly elaborated fantasy which arrives to transform it. Within the sentence, there is a running battle between a realism that describes things as they are, and a rhetoric that takes constant liberties with the appearances.

Consider for example the intricate beauty of this passage: "... the kitchen too seemed transformed — a floating corner of buoyancy and quicksilver: it was as if the table were in the middle of a Parisian concourse, streaming, gleaming; it had the look of a pointing, both transient and eternal, a place where you sat for a minute to gossip, and

also a place where the middle-aged Henry James came every day so that nothing in the large world would be lost on him." This grotesque splendour of evocation, an altogether satisfactory substitute for a physical description, is lavished on a small Manhattan kitchen in which an artificial human being has just cooked a soufflé for her creator, a civil servant called Ruth Puttermoss; the incongruity and the excess are perfectly calculated. The passage goes just too far enough.

The story of Puttermoss and her creature ("Puttermoss and Xanthippe") takes up over half the book and contains most of its high points: the fantastical elaboration, ballasted by an intimate knowledge of bureaucracy, of Puttermoss's rise to worldly power (Mayor of New York); inevitably given the New York priorities, is oddly balanced by a matter-of-fact account of her progressive gum disease.

The pair of sketches entitled "From A Refugee's Notebook" are by far the weakest in the volume. The first portentously analyses the décor of Freud's house in Vienna; the second is a surprisingly leaden fantasy about a cruise, on the planet Acrem (which no doubt should be read backwards), for Soviet Harcums: groups of women who can be hired to sew themselves together. These fragments contain the ingredients of Cynthia Ozick's successful fiction, but willfully separate them into one piece of non-fiction and one aimless improvisation.

When the materials are properly combined, the results are formidable: the text flushes with the idea of Jewishness and the idea of New York. The sense of history and the sense of place become resources of fact and feeling for an entirely new enterprise, and the whole unlikely rocket takes off, trailing sparks and coloured rain. After a vivid and exhilarating flight, admittedly, all that comes clattering down through the trees is a scorched stick; but with very little more discipline and expertise Cynthia Ozick will produce fireworks that can carry passengers.

POETRY

C. H. Sisson:
Selected Poems
104pp. Manchester: Carcanet New Press. £3.95.
0 85635 381 7
English Poetry 1900-1950
An Assessment
274pp. Manchester: Carcanet New Press. £9.95 (paperback, Methuen, £3.50).
0 85635 393 0

If only I could believe in God... The nearest I've got is this... Each time has been on a night when I couldn't sleep. I've had the absolute conviction — it's much more real than anything one can see or touch — that God and His world exist. And everyone can enter and find their rest. Except me.

So, in C. P. Snow's *The Light and the Dark* (1947), Roy Calvert, walking in the fields outside Cambridge in 1934. The position is not, either logically or in any other way, a tolerable one; but in the last decade their intuitions have made it common among liberal thinking persons in Britain. In criticism it is the rhetorical position at least of Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy*; among theologians, Don Cupitt in *Taking Leave of God* does not allow any closer approach to them to be other than vulgar or immature. Among our finest poets it is, expressed in their more delicate, oblique and perhaps more painful way, the place which Geoffrey Hill and C. H. Sisson describe. It is a place not only removed from God, but outside His world — at least as traditionally conceived — of persons and meanings: exiled from faith in language or thought, and from possession or belief in the existence of the self.

The last of these forms of exile is perhaps the most painful in Sisson's case because if one applies to him Owen Barfield's test of a poet — what words, being read him, do I use with an extended meaning? — the answer would, I think, be "I". That word at times comes near to whitening one's sense of anything else in the poems. For the great majority of them, for the whole period represented by *In the Trojan Ditch* (1974), the words "God" and "Christ" retained power enough to challenge it; but "Christ" tended always to have a terrifying context, as hunter, prey or presence among ghosts, and the power of both has waned in the two later collections, *Anchor and Exile*. No other word (unless it were "not") has seemed of such continuing force. What has held and held the word "I" in check, and generated Sisson's best poetry, has been a pair of pressures, both interfused with longing for the past — first, the presence of the physical landscape with its beauties, seen varying as refuge or desolation since his very first poems, and secondly, seen since "In Allusion to Propertius I III" with longing, guilt and regret, the presence of a dead woman.

These pressures taken together might compose one of the most primitive myths of the poet: "Orpheus among the beasts, and Eurydice, to which indeed Sisson constantly recurs. But to him, as he explains in the "Sevendicks Essays" published in *The Avoidance of Literature*, mythology is concerned with the identification of men. And men, as he puts it with a characteristic discomforting concreteness, is the being who now speaks and "at some stage of prehistory... could have sexual intercourse without being aware of it; as I might scratch my head without knowing it." (The symbol of this in his poetry is the paradoxical "ruthless stag," whom he associates with Aeneas and contrasts with John Donne.) Or man is the being whose nature God may have volitionally changed in the incarnation. "I", man, Actaeon, Orpheus, stand between Christ and when you visited the shades and you see my Eurydice, Christ, on that terrifying day? the beauty and darkness

The authenticity of 'I'

By Stephen Medcalf

And yet below the circle of my mind
Playing in spring-time there is Proserpine.
But I am rather Cerberus than Dis
Neither receive nor yet pursue this child
Nor am I Orpheus who could bring her back.

This aching or devouring "I" dominates not only Sisson's poetry but his sense of the poetry of others. *English Poetry 1900-1950* makes it clear that he regards any poetry that deviates, as does Yeats's, from the authenticity which is "I's" mark, or that obtains, as Eliot's does, some relief from "I", as a betrayal. Both the merits and defects of the book, like those of Robert Graves's *Clark Lectures*, perhaps indeed those of any poet's writings on poetry, lie in the beautiful clarity with which he follows the critical practice he describes in Pound: "He really is looking for himself, as if no one had ever looked before, and he is looking for whatever will help to give full intelligibility to what he has to say."

Just so with Sisson himself. The result is a book which scarcely recognizes among the traditions of modern poetry any other than that to which its author adheres, of "words that follow speech so closely that the reader is hardly aware that he has not merely overheard the sentence" and yet "have the weight of long experience and digested thought".

For Sisson's principal attempt to escape the aching or devouring "I" has been by philosophizing it out of existence. In a postscript to the book he makes it clear that it is only in terms of a relation with ends that he can understand the existence of a self over and beyond the body and its behaviour; that is, a relation to God or to society.

The notion of the relation to society, assuming a high ethic like a negative and bitter version of the Beatitudes, generates rather a strident satire, some good ("The Rone"), "Sparrows seen from an Office", or some (the epigram "On a Civil Servant") best forgotten. He approaches a greater mystery when in "The Nature of Man" he finds the ground of our reasons in sleep. In "Every reality is a kind of Sigh" (not included in the *Selected Poems*) he expresses a sense of desired exile from the self which ceases to exist as it becomes knownable.

When sex is known and the children have grown up
What blindness remains to me? And I cannot live without it.
There is only the dark arcum of religion.
I prowled round the outside and am not let in.

The self in relation to God appeared early in Sisson's poetry, when he was forty (for he came to poetry late), in the poem titled, after Dante, "In a Dark Wood". The poem expresses what one might think an ironic regard for Dante's and the Christian belief in the redemption by God's grace from the prison we make of our selves — were it not that it presaged Sisson's baptism.

Sisson's poetry at this time had an irregular voice, the strangled effect of an inhibited temperament bursting into energy, and reflects the kind of inspiration he describes in Eliot's words as a "release", a "breaking down of strong habitual barriers", by its knotty elegance strewn with jarring changes of linguistic register, as if fragments remain of the shells that have been broken through. The subsequent struggle to express his relation to the source of this inspiration as a relation to God naturally generated prayers: his two most direct and best poems, "On my Fifty-First Birthday" and "Logituit Senex".

— O Lord my God, simplify my existence —
— Hold this world in your mind.
But his faith in the creed that he

escape under a mask, as "wishing to begin"? Why dismiss "Little Gidding" and "The Dry Salvages" because they "offer no novelties", and suppose that Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something Upon which to rejoice represents a wilful construction of Christian faith, when the whole trichotomy of that first part of "Ash Wednesday" suggests that the construction is breaking down even while it is made into the opposite humility, the shift from "I" to "us" of "And pray to God to have mercy upon us".

The answer, I think, lies in Sisson's unitary sense of "I". He shares with Eliot a complex sense of the word, but he does not think of "I" as something that can be divided and atomized, which is the whole thrust at the centre of Eliot's poetry. Sisson would, so to speak, find Sidney's "I" think, and think that I think rightly" odd because for him there is no contrast. Eliot has a direct apprehension of self-consciousness, and a will to analyse it, which Sisson has not. In the "Sevendicks Essays" Sisson remarks that the word *conscience* is preferable to *consciousness*, and the French are more fortunate and more exact in having a word *conscience* which does not distinguish the two. Sisson's intention here, to confine the meaning of consciousness to the relation with *ends*, would give a narrow (though within its limits valid) interpretation of Eliot's "To be conscious is not to be in time" and render incomprehensible the whole of *Four Quartets*.

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he says, "radiates from the Incarnation, the hural of God in man", has, it seems, waned. His phrase is odd, and, perhaps, significant: for it is the inverse of the Athanasian doctrine, which Sisson's belief in the validation of human nature by the incarnation suggests, that the Word became flesh "not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God". This is a doctrine which may have large consequences for the relation of any kind of symbols, including ordinary words, to their meaning. Eliot, notably, took these consequences seriously, and aspired to a language that like Dante's should transcend itself and point beyond the human. Sisson takes him to task for the lamentation which consists with "the Word in the desert", the fact that words "strain... under the tension". "One must accept", says Sisson, "the movement of life and language." That is of course a caricature, and Sisson does not in practice believe anything so over-simple. His own attempt to resolve the some tension constitutes his most ambitious poem, "The Usk". To me it seems a magnificent but, as he would say, rather "constructed" version of the earlier and more direct "Logituit Senex", written when he had found it easier to believe that he could enter the City in which "Christ is the language which we speak to God / And also God, so that we speak in truth". "The Usk" proclaims exile and inability to achieve that language, and at its end the poet's self is resolved in a mixture of sleep and God.

Sisson has since been aiming at a language which would approach more closely to temporality. It has often been very lovely: yet his language has always been, so to speak, anorexic in its struggle for authenticity, and is now often like a language for speaking to ghosts. Its sound has something of the remoteness, clarity and dryness of the half-voices of the dead, the elusive flow of its imagery is increasingly dreamlike. Paradoxically, Christ, though less often named, may be more fully realized in it — in "Marignus" along with Sisson's other captives, Maurras and Dante, among "the olives in the garden" in the "fisherman's face, gardener's rather" of "Pierre, or perhaps Adam". In fact Sisson's late poems seem close to "The Hollow Men" as he describes it, the point after which his sympathies with Eliot's development waned, a poem of holding back... but with a new uncertain awareness of what he was holding back from. The landscapes, however, are not, like Eliot's, those of dream and death, but of Provence, or of Somerset and the kingdom of Arthur. Perhaps Sisson will in the end be prized not as the poet of "I", but as a religious poet and even more a poet of his first and greatest love, landscape. I should be inclined to think the last two poems printed in *Selected Poems*, "In Flood" and "Burringtoncombe", his supreme achievements.

No distance was ever like this one
The flat land with its willows, and the great sky
With the river reflecting its uncertainty
But no more I.

After an interval of three years, a new volume in the Harvard English Series, Number 9, *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, has recently appeared (390pp. Harvard University Press. £21 (paperback, £7). 0 674 01640 8 (pbk. 0 674 01641 6). As the editor, Morton W. Bloomfield points out in his preface, "Allegory and myth have again come into their own (and) are now seen as central to the understanding of the literary art." The volume, which consists largely of essays on specific texts or authors, includes contributions by Stephen A. Barney on "Viable Allegory: The *Distinction* of Peter the Chanter"; Patricia Crilly on "The *Orica* as Celtic folk-tale, Christian Pilgrim, and Medieval King"; by John A. Hodgson on "Transcendental Tropes: Coleridge's Rhetoric of Allegory and Symbol" and by Milla B. Riggs on "The Allegory of Freud's Acquisition in 'The Castle of'".

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Swift at Moor Park

Problems in Biography and Criticism

A. C. Elias, Jr.

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Watching green-eyed

By Mark Abley

JULIAN BARNES:
Before She Met Me.
183pp. Cape. £6.50.
0 224 01985 6

The hero of Julian Barnes's first novel, *Metroland*, has the uncanny ability to detach himself from experience and to observe his mixed reactions. Having lost his virginity he asks, "why didn't they tell you about the football fan in the back of your skull, the man with the rattle and the scarf who shouts Yippee and stamps his feet on the terraces?" When his insensitivity provokes his girlfriend to tears and anger, "the outburst gave me sudden jabs of pride: the pride of participation, and the pride of investigation." In his second novel, *Before She Met Me*, Barnes has taken this watchfulness and violent aloofness to a grim conclusion. Graham Hendrick, a mild-mannered historian at London University, becomes obsessed with his second wife's past; as she'd been an actress who frequently made brief appearances in undistinguished films, visual evidence is easily available. He drives for miles to watch her for a minute. Ann's previous affairs torment him, remove him from contact with everyday life. Nothing she does in the present can alter his fascination with her history. "What could account for such a shift in perception?" Graham wonders in a moment of relative lucidity. "What if your brain became your enemy?"

It's an interesting idea, and one that gives the imagination plenty of room to manoeuvre. But after a merciful opening paragraph, *Before She Met Me* lurches downhill, it

seems far better planned than realized, as if another draft or two could have made a world of difference. For most of the characters are paper-thin. Graham's first wife is a caricature, their daughter a virtual cypher. Ann, the former actress who unwittingly provokes his obsession, seems strangely inert, and her behaviour is scarcely more believable than that of her husband; even after a party at which his delusion brings him to demolish their French window with a garden fork, she refuses to admit that he might be jealous, still less mentally ill. The only character who has as much life as Barnes's strenuous prose is a middle-aged novelist called Jack Lupton, who began his career as an earthy provincial realist and has all but turned into a latter-day Flaubert. Windy, genial, sly and adulterous, Jack provides a much-needed contrast to the introspective Graham. But we know him as well after his second appearance as at the end. Only Graham is allowed to develop, and since the green-eyed monster soon dominates his temperament to the exclusion of everything else, he too becomes predictable: the only interest lies in seeing where his jealousy will lead.

Part of the trouble arises from the cleverness of Barnes's writing. He seems unable to resist any wry conceit, any passing whimsy. Some of these are very funny, notably Ann's translation of the remarks made by a guide at a Roquefort factory in France: "The history goes that there was a barge once who was with his muttons and it was the lunch. He sat in a cavern with some bread and some cheese...." An occasional metaphor or sharp perception shows off another of the author's talents: "when he had wound on, he'd felt the ridged knob transfer to his thumb suspicions of the cam-

era's inner turbulence; but as long as the knob still turned, he heaped for the best." It takes more than intermittent felicity, however, to make a convincing novel. What the preposterous plot requires is a certain intensity of feeling, and a prose that is able to convey sensuous and emotional force as well as adroit observations. Graham Hendrick is far from being the truth about his life; but we remain so distant from him, and from all the other characters, that their actions begin to seem insignificant as well as unlikely.

As we might expect from Barnes, *Before She Met Me* is stuffed with literary references: "Gomberg's *Montaigne*, *Othello*, *Rebecca*, *Aldous Huxley*, *Arthur Koestler*, *Rudyard Kipling*, and many more. Yet one of these artful allusions goes badly wrong. At an early stage of his obsession, Graham spends a solitary afternoon hunting through the bookcases in search of volumes given to his wife by other people. Success at the sport brings no pleasure: "As he sat on the floor and looked at the pile of books which represented his winnings, he felt the approach of a daunting sadness. On top lay a copy of *The End of the Affair*. It was given to Ann by a lover who signed himself M. (the same initial as has the narrator of Greene's novel)." "Graham thought of him as the prick with the tie." The analogy seems clear: *The End of the Affair*, like *Before She Met Me*, is a tale of love, obsession and hatred, set in London, centrally concerned with a past affair between a writer and a married woman, and leading up to death. But the comparison is all to Barnes's disadvantage: one has only to remember the passion, tenderness, complexity and moral seriousness of Greene to realize something of what's lacking in *Before She Met Me*.

Elizabeth Berridge

PEOPLE AT PLAY

"Exile and old age are the themes of this most accomplished novel... Miss Berridge's characters are both funny and pathetic; with mastery skill she interweaves the grotesque and sinister with the comic and robust... her powers of physical description are remarkable."
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Penelope Lively

NEXT TO NATURE, ART

"She is indeed marvellously accurate, catching again and again with perfection the nuances of England and the English today."
Sunday Telegraph

Heinemann

commentary

Dallas-on-Thames

By Kenneth O. Morgan

Nancy Astor
BBC TV

The mystique that surrounds the career and reputation of Lady Astor is one of the more curious features of twentieth-century Britain. In her lifetime, she seems to have bewitched or beguiled a remarkable array of public figures, from predictable victu-
lins like Lloyd George or Bernard Shaw, to such unlikely admirers as Felix Frankfurter and Mahatma Gandhi. The nura survives, years after her death. In 1980 Michael Foot could write that "nobody can quite capture the excitement and loveliness which was Lady Astor", and this may be accepted. In fact, her historical importance has three main aspects. First, in her odyssey from post-bellum Virginia into the British aristocracy, she symbolizes one thread in the Anglo-American interconnection prior to the First World War. Cliveden, that gloomy, monumental hulk, was a mausoleum of one facet of the "special relationship". Secondly, whatever the myths linked with the "Cliveden set", the Astors do underline the illusions (on the part of the fellow-travelling right rather more than of the response towards the dictators by the appeasers within the National government. And finally, of course, Lady Astor's entry into the House of Commons in 1919 struck a crucial blow for feminists everywhere. Beyond this, the record is a thin one. Indeed, in her twenty-five years in the House, Lady Astor achieved far

less for women's rights than did either Ellen Wilkinson or Eleanor Rathbone. Her human sympathy for the poor and unemployed in Plymouth and elsewhere did not get far beyond late-Victorian Christian charity. She was, on the whole, an anachronism, though evidently a much-loved anachronism.

Few of these themes have been illuminated in the nine-part costume drama, *Nancy Astor*, which achieves the political implausibility and personal bathos of last year's Lloyd George serial, without showing either the distinction of direction or the brilliance of acting displayed by the BBC (Wales) team. The entire balance of the Astor series, apparently geared to the demands of transatlantic viewers, is hopelessly wrong. The first three episodes spend interminable time in the American South, pursuing the fortunes of the Langhorns and the disastrous first marriage between Nancy and Bobby Shaw. Magnolia blossom and hominy grits crush the vitality out of the early part of the series, and it never recovers. Not until the end of episode six, two thirds through, does Nancy actually enter the House of Commons. Thereafter, the political narrative is inevitably rushed and patchy. Unemployment, appeasement, Hitler and the war come second best to the family tensions and sexual brinkmanship. The political scenes are trivialized to the point of high comedy. The folksy backchat between Nancy and the Speaker (wrongly named), when she first enters the House, things do not improve thereafter. The Plymouth elections speak with cockney accents, perhaps to balance the distinctly transient Southern

drawl of Nancy and her family. It might be added that the unwashed poor of Plymouth in 1929 look remarkably spruce and well-nourished, as do the poor whites of Virginia among whom Nancy conducts her missionary work as a child, in episode one.

Just as the background is improbable, so too is the complex of personal relations against which Nancy operates. The role of Waldorf is sadly misinterpreted, since that worthy man - a social reformer-Tory MP for nine years, a major figure in Lloyd George's Garden Suburb and a powerful influence as owner of the *Observer* (not mentioned) - becomes here little more than a cardboard cut-out. Vigorous "Round Table" men like Philip Kerr and Bob Brand have the very life throttled out of them. Some of the more private aspects, Nancy's phobia of alcohol for instance, or her financial commitment to Christian Science, come across rather better. But the overall effect is of a supremely political figure handled in an unpolitical fashion.

The major characters are all somewhat bereft. Lisa Harrow, as Nancy, is winsomely attractive in the early episodes - a Southern belle indeed, even if the accent is more Solid Surrey than Solid South. But she has little scope to convey the witfulness and even brutality that formed an ineradicable part of Nancy's make-up, as the disastrous record of family tragedy may suggest. James Fox (Waldorf), so superb in the detached self-control of the younger Carlton in *Trevor Griffith's Country*, is buried here in a dull Germanic stereotype. David Warner conveys some of the

muddled idealism of Philip Kerr but little of his febrile passion. Perhaps the most satisfactory performances come in the more obscure characters. Pierce Brosnan as Robert Shaw suggests something of the physical drive of a lustful alcoholic. Regrettably, the serial does not reveal, as Derek Marlowe's accompanying novel (*Nancy Astor*, 252pp, Penguin, £1.95) makes clear, that after escaping from Nancy's clutches, Shaw lived happily (and soberly) ever after as the husband of his ex-mistress, Lucy Conyers. And Nigel Havers, given more leeway than most of the cast, makes much of the pathetic, homosexual dissoluteness of the wretched Bobby. Nancy's first son and chief victim. The brief scene in episode six between the elderly Shaw and the son he has not seen in thirty years, provides a touching cameo. But such moments are infrequent.

This series affords ammunition for those who argue, *The Wilderness Years* notwithstanding, that high politics cannot be credibly portrayed on television. *Nancy Astor*, like Lloyd George, comes across best as soap opera, as *Dallas-on-Thames* with an everyday story of Cliveden folk to unravel, and Nancy herself stimulating and bullying her tribe. The wider significance of it all remains obscure. Despite a clutch of biographies (including a most attractive one by John Gigg), there is still much to be written on how such a rarefied figure came to be taken seriously by the British public in the inter-war years, and how such an irrelevant ménage as Cliveden (carefully screened off by trees from Marlborough, Reading and the twentieth century) came to play any role in the social underpinning of British post-capitalist political discourse.

An echo-chamber

By Anne Duchêne

The Sidmouth Letters
BBC TV

BBC 2 gave up thirty-five minutes last Friday to a televised version of Jane Gardam's *"The Sidmouth Letters"*, published in 1980, a short story postulating quite legitimately the possession of a modern Devon family of love-letters written by Jane Austen to an unknown gentleman, whose death prevented his collecting them from an address in Sidmouth. The adaptation gives rise to the usual thoughts about the difficulties of translating fiction into film, and some new ones about how the BBC, especially in these straitened times, might well explore the translation of short stories, rather than of nine-part block-busters.

The film is very carefully and lovingly directed by Nicholas Renton, and Ian Stone's photography is often very handsome. The story is adapted by Paula Milne. This might have been dangerous: Jane Gardam is a minimalist, working with a very fine point - skilfully, mostly, but now and then indelicately too - whereas Paula Milne favours a blinding wash over a dutifully up-to-date theme. (Her current BBC-1 *"Love Story"* serial is about the pains of infertility, among erstwhile Flower People, perched now somewhere near the Chiswick fly-over.) However, with more than a minute to a page, she has time, here, to be faithful to the story.

If it were less necessary to begin with confusing flash-backs - the heroine's hair-do an important index (handing loosely indicates the past, planned-back means the present) while we learn that her American professor had gone - plucked her Love and Privacy, and typed it up: a bit for publication. Minus. That established, there is a heavily unpolished sequence about the professor in Claridge's and on the scent

of the letters. Philip O'Brien, who only about ten minutes screen-time in all, plays the professor very bard as an ebullient Mailer-esque literary impresario and stirrer-up of once-troubled waters. Marcella Markham, equally short of time, goes hell-for-leather as his wife, costume jewellery a-tremble and a swig from a flask handy even in the devoutly sterilized atmosphere of the museum at Chaverton. They emerge a bit bruised and breathless, as honourable stereotypes, or cartoons.

This conflicts with the remoulder of the film, which is in English watercolour. The Devon sequences are stabilized less by trusty Patience Aulic, rather overdoing things as an autocrat of failing memory, than by Fiona Walker's lovely, modest cameo of an English village-spinster, bright-eyed, bird-like, sometimes sensitive and sometimes not. The heroine, played with rather ambiguous sweetness by Jane Wymark, does not tell the professor she is related to the owners of the letters, even when she burns the documents and scatters them, unreared, in the sea.

A small fable, then, about "love and privacy", which is telling enough, in days of full frontal publicity. It falters because it is "faithful" to the story, but not to its tone. It lacks the unity given by the first-person narrative; the visual element overcomes the subjective, and detail takes on delusive importance, misleading the unprepared viewer. It is rather like a small boat where the ballast is not properly secured, but bumps around. Finding and holding the narrative focus is obviously the difficulty. In all such translations to film (one realizes how wise John Mortimer was in this still-reverberating *Brickfield*, to keep the unity of a narrator). A good short story is not so much a microcosm as an echo-chamber, an enclosed world, sufficient to itself, and easily falsified, by what has to be seen rather than heard or imagined. This is an attempt of enough depth and delicacy to make one wish the BBC did more of such things.

commentary

Candour and insolence

By Dawn Ades

Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti
Whitechapel Art Gallery

Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery until May 2, is a small and vivid exhibition of two artists virtually unknown here. As the catalogue points out, they are brought together for a purpose: by juxtaposing the exhibition tends to compare and contrast their lives and work, and through this to raise wider questions about women, art and politics. It succeeds in a remarkably light-handed way, giving only the essential facts about each artist in two panels at the start, and then leaving the works to speak for themselves.

Some similarities between the two artists are largely self-evident: both are women, and Marxists, involved in the avant-garde and politically active, working in Mexico during the 1920s, a peculiarly vital period in that country's cultural and political history. Both were involved, but only indirectly, in the massive mural schemes initiated under the patronage of the Minister of Education José Vasconcelos, to cover the public walls of Mexico City. Tina Modotti was asked to photograph the frescoes of Diego Rivera, Orozco and others, and a series of these photographs is in the exhibition. In 1929 Frida Kahlo married the already legendary Rivera. He painted both women as revolutionary leaders on a wall in the Ministry of Education (1923-28), where they are seen distributing arms to the people. But neither woman chose to work on this scale herself. Tina Modotti became a photographer. Frida Kahlo looked to the humble traditions of Mexican folk painting.

But the contrast between them are more striking than their similarities. Their backgrounds were very different. Frida Kahlo (1907-54) was an intellectual of the bourgeoisie, with a German father and a Mexican mother with Indian blood; she lived in the same house in Coyocacan all her life. Modotti (1896-1942) was from a working-class immigrant family which settled in California. She worked in a textile mill, then married the American poet and painter, Robert Richey. She acted in silent films in Hollywood, then moved with the photographer Edward Weston to Mexico, where they lived together from 1923 to 1926. She joined the Mexican Communist Party and was expelled from it in 1930.

Through friends in the Party she found refuge first in Berlin, then in Moscow. She worked, from 1928, for the International Red Aid in Poland, France and Spain, where she remained throughout the Civil War, only returning to Mexico in 1938, six weeks after Modotti and Kahlo had again left 1929. In that autumn Rivera was expelled from the Communist Party, and Modotti as a result, renounced her friendship with him. She remained a loyal Party member all her life. Rivera and Kahlo on the other hand identified with the dissident, and Kahlo gave her home to Trotsky when he arrived in Mexico in 1937.

Frida Kahlo's paintings are intensely, sometimes stridently, personal; many are self-portraits. They show two dominant themes: physical suffering, and the emotional pain of her life in crippling physical pain. Following an accident to a tram, a frame crashed into her school bag, shattering her pelvis, spine and hip. She was after this, while in hospital, that she began to paint. Unable to have children, she had operations after operations, and finally her injured leg was amputated shortly before she died in 1954.

One of her most savage paintings

is "Childbirth", of 1932. A woman lies alone on a bed in an almost bare room, the top of her body shrouded in white, her legs splayed towards the viewer with the baby's head just forced out. Above the bed hangs a portrait of the Virgin as Mater Dolorosa, with two knives sticking in her neck; on it, the shrouded head lies on a pink pillow laced in white and printed in luxurious detail. This painting does not just draw on the Mexican tradition of *ex-voto* painting - in an ironic sense it actually is one. *Ex-votos* were usually, like this one, painted on tin. They were made as offerings to be hung up in church in gratitude to the Virgin, Christ or a particular saint, who had miraculously saved the giver from accident, or sickness, and who is depicted above the event itself, usually shown in naive and gory detail. There is usually a description below; here, though, because there has been no rescue, there is none - a carefully prepared scroll lies blank along the base of the picture.

In her many self-portraits she shows herself, as she often dressed, in full Mexican costume. That this elaborate dress, partly adopted to mask her crippled body, was also crucially entwined in her relationship with Rivera and her sense of her own sexuality is made clear in "Self-portrait with cropped hair" (painted in 1940 after her divorce from Rivera, to whom she was shortly after remarried). "If I loved you," runs the inscription, arranged along the top of the painting like a popular song, "it was for your hair; now that you're bald, I no longer love you." Dressed as a man, Kahlo has disguised herself in terms of conventional feminine appeal by shearing her own head. Vindictive and humorous, she is both resentful martyr and revenging deity. By so thoroughly examining her personal life, Kahlo is posing political questions. The urgently personal becomes part of woman's wider experience in marriage, domesticity, society, work. Her choice of working within the folk and popular art was closely linked to her sense of being a woman. Breton recognized her capacity to make visible "the mind's private preserves", which she displays "proudly with a mixture of candour and insolence."

Modotti, on the other hand, took refuge behind the objective camera eye; most of her photographs date from her period in Mexico and are compassionately impersonal. Once a model herself, she reversed her relationship with the camera. Initially under the influence of Weston, producing fine close-up studies and even more abstract compositions than he did, she became increasingly absorbed in photographing social conditions and the political life of the country, though she still constructed her photographs with the utmost formal attention. Shortly after arriving in Moscow in 1930 she gave up photography, reverting to it only after her return to Mexico in 1938. Her way of working had been intimately linked to the kind of camera she used - a large, old-fashioned Graflex, in which the image could be seen the size it would finally appear. She found it difficult to adapt to the kind of journalistic or documentary work she felt appropriate to the new conditions under which she was living. When asked why she had abandoned photography, she replied that she could not use the camera when there was so much work to be done. Had the exhibition limited itself to her work alone, we would have no idea what she looked like. However, with understandable licence, several portraits of her by Weston, and stills of her as an actress, are included, and they reveal that she was a great beauty.

The catalogue, 80pp, £6.75, 0 85488 0530, available from: Whitechapel Art Gallery, includes texts by Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen, Tina Modotti, André Breton, Diego Rivera, Pablo Neruda and others.



Tina Modotti's photograph "Woman from Tehuantepec", 1929, from the exhibition reviewed here.

Art and autocracy

By Kate Flint

Annalenta: Arte e Cultura in Italia
Milan

Dominating the interior of Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele is a replica of the scaffolding structure which the Fascist regime erected there in 1934 for its own publicity purposes. Accompanied by a car, a transport truck and that favourite Fascist toy, a small aeroplane, it gives an instant material impression of the 1930s. Hung with posters extolling Mussolini, brave patriotism and agricultural production; attacking the Jews and other "degenerates", it intentionally forms, also, the ideological centre of the comprehensive *Annalenta* exhibition. It provides a political statement against which to place the other varied displays.

No aspect of Italian art and culture in the 1930s seems to have been too large or small for inclusion in this show (on until April 30; catalogue, edited by Nadine Bortolotti, Nazzotti, Milan, £58pp, £25,000). Italy's grandiose dreams of colonial expansion appear in the plans and sketches of East African cities, where long white De Chirico colonnades impose a metaphysical order on the desert. Busts and images of aviators and air-reeds, together with paintings executed from the cockpit's latest vantage point, convey the Fascist excitement at the novel notion of controlling the sky. Reproductions of the murals and bas-reliefs which adorned public buildings show the preoccupation with glories of the Italian mythological and historical past and their reaffirmation with a modern sense of national unity and greatness. Stern figures of justice pose with the old Roman symbols of scales and fasces; depictions of women sucking future Fascists deliberately echo in their poses the iconography of Renaissance mariology. The dominating themes of the regime crop up constantly, too, in the ephemera of 1930s life: on the covers of school exercise books, in holiday advertisements with their stress on robust healthiness, in the charts of physical jerks for school children and the uniforms of the Fascist youth movements. The cult of the leader, of Mussolini himself was always apparent; his profile superimposed through photomontage on massed groups of his people to show his controlling presence; his voice available in the boxed record collections of his speeches.

The National Gallery has just purchased two decorative paintings by the French artist Joseph Parrocel (1646-1704), "The Boar of Europe" and "The Hawk of Asia". They alone survive from a set of allegorical commissions for Louis XIV and given by him to his son the Comte de Toulouse. Parrocel was celebrated as a battle-painter, but these uncharacteristic and fanciful hunting-scenes foreshadow the work of Watteau and Fragonard. They may be seen in

Il Duce once commented that he did "not know if one could separate the two names of Italy and art". A painter of the 1930s was faced by several choices, as the works on show in the newly renovated gallery underneath the Piazza del Duomo clearly demonstrate. Outright opposition to the regime could be expressed through political cartoons, or Less predictably, thematic content - as in Sassu's Spanish subject, *The Execution of the Asturian Miners*. Or painters could practise the politics of evasion, retreating into quiet landscapes, intimate interiors and pastel portraits. Direct support for Fascism was expressed not just through public murals and monuments, but in the paintings produced in response to the topics set for the official Cremona competition: "Listening to Mussolini on the Radio" or "Italian Youth".

More predictably, however, the regime adopted the Futurist belief that a revolutionary political practice should be supported by a revolutionary art form. Not until Mussolini drew closer to Germany in the later 1930s did Italy accept the Nazi equation of abstract art with cultural degeneracy. The interlocking lines and spaces of Lirici and Soldati's constructivist canvases were reproduced in many other design forms, from perfume bottles to architectural facades.

As the introduction to the impressive catalogue states, to condemn Fascism from a moral and political standpoint does not mean that one should remain ignorant of its characteristic manifestations. In no section of this exhibition, whether fashion or photography, children's comics or claycasts, can one fail to notice how all kinds of design were relentlessly pressed into the service of the autocratic regime. The very variety of the artefacts on show is the most telling indication of the pervasive nature of Fascist cultural policy.

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CHATELAIN & WINDUS

Various shades of Red

By Archie Brown

NOGDAN SZAJKOWSKI (Editor):
Marxist Governments
A World Survey
3 Volumes. 939pp. Macmillan. £50.
0 333 2669 3

Only the politically paranoid would see the diversity and argument within the international communist movement, and the great differences among the policies pursued by a variety of states claiming to be Marxist, as part of a gigantic plot to lull non-communists into a false sense of security. The differences, which are real, present problems of a different sort. Though it is possible to find a number of features which are common to many communist states, it is becoming increasingly difficult to select those which are common in all.

One could make a case for saying that the common denominator is professed adherence to Marxism-Leninism, but there was a time in the Soviet Union when Stalinism, far from being a pejorative term, was accorded a status not inferior to that of Marxism and Leninism, and it is so long ago that in China "Mao Zedong Thought" was understood as the definitive adaptation of Marxism to Chinese conditions, was raised on a pedestal higher than that of Leninism.

One could rest one's case on the type of political and economic relations to be found within the society and define a communist state in terms, first, of "the leading role of the party" (that is to say, a party recognized as communist within the international communist movement, even though it may bear a name other than "Communist Party"); second, of intra-party relations which concentrate a great deal of power within the highest party organs and in the full-time professional party apparatus at all levels (to describe which party officials have appropriated the term "democratic centralism", even though in practice, that concept includes not only a willingness on the part of higher echelons within the party to listen to the views of lower echelons but also the ability of the latter to hold the former responsible for their actions and to censure them); and, third, public or, at any rate, non-capitalist ownership of the means of production (with exceptions sometimes made for agriculture, but not for industrial production).

Even these three defining characteristics do not, however, hold good for all communist systems at all times. There have been shifts of power within the systems so that at one time a dictatorial leader may wield a power superior to that of the party apparatus and may subordinate the party itself to other agencies wielding coercive power. Thus, as no less an authority than Nikita Khrushchev testified in his "secret speech" to the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, seventy per cent of the members of the Central Committee elected at the Seventeenth Congress of the party "were arrested and shot (mostly in 1937-38)". That period, in which the security forces, responsible to Stalin personally and to his secretariat, enjoyed a power superior to the party, cannot meaningfully be defined, in terms of "the leading role of the party". Neither is the supreme orthodoxy of the party the most obvious feature of China during the "Cultural Revolution", nor of Poland in the immediate aftermath of the imposition of martial law.

Most of the countries with which the three-volume *Marxist Governments: A World Survey* is concerned would be readily identified as "communist states" by Western observers. But conscious of the difficulties involved in drawing demarcation lines here - when does a communist state become, or cease to be, a communist state? - the editor, Nogdan Szajkowski, has settled for "Marxist Governments". What the countries have in common is that they are ruled by self-proclaimed Marxists, and this self-assertion is adopted as the basic criterion of inclusion within the group of states to be surveyed.

In an introductory chapter, Michael Waller and Szajkowski emphasize the importance of a "shared rhetoric", but shift their ground somewhat when they place the stress upon communism as a movement. Allegiance to an international communist movement, notwithstanding the very great differences of view within it, is one objective criterion for describing a party or state as "communist", but adherence to this "movement" is far from being synonymous with adherence to Marxism, since there are not only different tendencies within the international communist movement, but also different movements within Marxism, some of which reject that international communist movement in which (for all their differences) states as diverse as the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia and Cuba still adhere.

Thus, to prefer the adjective "Marxist" to "communist" or to "Marxist-Leninist" as a way of classifying régimes (though Waller and Szajkowski sometimes use the second and third terms as if they were synonymous with the first) raises at least as many problems as it solves. Few reasonably well-informed observers would be happy to accept as democratic every political régime which claimed to be "democratic" (and which would include, to take but two examples, Stalin's Russia and Pol Pot's Kampuchea).

Indeed, the editorial view of "Marxist" governments is questioned in the second chapter of the first volume by one of the contributors, Neil Harding, who explicitly asks: "What does it mean to call a régime Marxist?" Harding argues that "a Marxist régime cannot simply be characterized in terms of the goals it professes. There is, to put it at its most extreme, something very odd about the emergence of a self-styled Marxist régime as a result of a shift of political allegiance within a small sector of an army's officer corps in a country where subsistence agriculture is the overwhelmingly preponderant mode of production". In such a régime, he aptly suggests, "Marxism may well become merely a convenient rhetoric of legitimization for Jacobins, populists, nationalists or tyrants".

Waller and Szajkowski are not only rather more inclined to take at face value the "shared rhetoric" of Marxism, they also on occasion get carried away by it. Thus, Roger Garaudy is quoted with approval as saying that Marxism "has as its universal vocation to be rooted in the culture of every people". This unverifiable, and indeed mystical, belief seems to bear little relationship to what has actually happened in most communist states. Marxism has been at times transformed, at times transmuted and most commonly simply ignored - at least by the mass of the people; what it has not become is rooted in the culture of every people.

It may, of course, be said that it is also possible that a basket will rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns a crown - but that, too, is a species of religious belief. The empirical study of communist states provides little more solid ground for supposing that Marxism is on its way to becoming rooted in the culture of every people than for imagining that Enver Hoxha is the best of Revolutions.

The occasional flight of fancy notwithstanding, Waller and Szajkowski get this substantial work off to a stimulating and lively start. Much of what they say on the comparative study of communism would command broad assent, though some of it is more debatable. Thus, in arguing against a Soviet-centred study of communist systems, they rightly point out that "the Soviet Union's authority is under rather substantial attack - from other ruling parties, from non-ruling parties, which traditionally have supported the Soviet Union's policies and imitated its organisational patterns, and from the Trotskyist Left". But the Soviet Union's power in the world today and its authority in the international communist movement is so great that, even for those non-ruling parties (such as the Italian or Spanish) or ruling parties (such as the Yugoslav or Chinese) who have criticized the Soviet model and who have attempted to develop alternative policies and (to a more limited extent) alternative organizational patterns, the issue of how they relate to the Soviet Union is still for them a matter of prime importance. This being so, it would be premature for academic observers to play down the immense significance of the Soviet Union within that movement.

Waller and Szajkowski are right to draw attention to the importance of the movement and to argue the case for examining the non-ruling communist parties in association with the ruling communist states. (They have, moreover, practised what they preach, for since the publication of *Marxist Governments: A World Survey*, the first issue of a new quarterly journal, *Communist Affairs: Documents and Analysis*, under Szajkowski's editorship and with Waller as chairman of the editorial board, has appeared. This useful periodical includes not only interesting materials emanating from communist states but also some of the more important documents produced by non-ruling parties.) Non-ruling parties can hardly avoid taking a position on what is happening in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and, as the recent exchange of acerbities between the Soviet Communist Party and the Italian Communist Party over martial law in Poland illustrates, the Soviet Union may feel impelled to respond.

While correctly stressing the diversity of the international communist movement as a whole and the "phenomenal variety" of the non-ruling parties, Waller and Szajkowski seek to find the common threads which tenuously hold the movement together and stress in that connection the element of common beliefs. As they put it:

"the distinction which is so obvious in Western political science between a ruling party and a non-ruling one is by no means so obvious within the logic of communist politics. In terms of the structures and functions of existing political systems the distinction is in fact, in terms of the shared goals and cosmology it is much less substantial."

It should, however, be added that the apparently "shared goals" and superficially similar ways of looking at the world can obscure more than they reveal. There is a very great difference between joining a communist party within a hostile social environment (in extreme cases an illegal and persecuted party) and joining a communist party which plays, and is guaranteed, the "leading and guiding role" within a society, and membership of which opens doors to promotion and privilege. A recent sociological survey in Hungary found that young party members were on average more favourably disposed towards greater inequality within the society than the average non-party member in the same age group. It would be surprising, to say the least, if young Communist Party members in Western Europe were to be found, to be distinguished from their peer group by their more traditional attitude towards egalitarianism. A ruling party within an established communist system is, indeed, joined by some people who would be communists within capitalist systems. But it is also joined by those who in a liberal, social democratic, conservative or right-wing nationalist party, as well as by those who would not join any party at all where such membership conferred no personal advantages.

If it is allegiance to Marxism in general, rather than adherence to the

international communist movement, which we have in mind, the differences in goals and world outlook become still more marked. I clearly recall the reaction of a Soviet intellectual after he had had the singular experience of engaging in a long discussion with a young Western Marxist (non-communist) revolutionary. He told me that he felt as if he had been transported in a time machine and that for the first time in his life he knew what many of the revolutionaries in Imperial Russia must have been like. It was, he said, extraordinarily interesting to listen to the views and to understand the thought processes of such a person "for it is impossible to find anyone in the Soviet Union like that".

For certain purposes, it is worth embracing in the same study non-ruling and ruling communist parties; their political and ideological relations and their organizational links, however tenuous, are matters of some significance. It is at best of much milder interest to see how the ruling and non-ruling communist parties relate to the incredibly heterogeneous Marxist heritage (not "movement") as a whole. However, the more that is learnt about the membership of ruling communist parties, the less one is likely to find in common not only between one ruling party and another (since part of the traditionally dominant political culture of each society in time rubs off on the ruling party) but also between the goals and cosmology of members of ruling parties to one another and those who join non-ruling communist parties and thereby attract, in varying degree, the odium inseparable from a radical attack on the existing structure of power and privilege.

Waller and Szajkowski's provocative introduction raises, as will be apparent, even broader issues than those dealt with in the remaining chapters of these three volumes. They consist of studies of twenty-four states ruled by leaders claiming to be Marxists, ranging alphabetically from Albania to Yugoslavia and in political significance from the Soviet Union to Benin. That is a quite tall enough order. But it is also an exercise which is useful on several levels. Szajkowski has encouraged his contributors to ask many of the same questions and to provide data, where possible, on the country of their speciality which can be related to comparable data from the other states included within the volumes. Thus, the work is both a handy source of much factual information and a contribution to the comparative study of communism. It is no fault of the editor and authors if the quantity and quality of information vary greatly from one of the states surveyed to another and if the book was already in a number of respects out of date by the time it appeared. It does more than enough to justify a continuing existence and it is to be hoped that it will be updated and revised periodically and published in further editions.

Each chapter contains a historical survey of the country's development in the communist period, discussion of the major political institutions, biographical notes on the top political leaders, and some basic statistics, ranging from population density and distribution to party membership (where known). Foreign relations, economic development and ideological changes also receive some attention from the contributors.

In most cases the authors of the "country" chapters are specialists on the politics or history of their country. Where the editor has been unable to find someone who is familiar with the primary sources in the language of the country concerned, he has handed over the task to a knowledgeable "comparativist" who makes the best of the translated primary sources and of the secondary sources. In this manner, Szajkowski himself produces a workmanlike chapter on Albania and Leslie Burgin, very competently covers

Some authors are more fortunate

than others inasmuch as they are not only writing on countries which are the main subject of their expertise but on ones which also have particularly interesting primary source materials or a comparatively rich literature of Western scholarly analysis to draw upon. There is no doubt that most of the contributors of chapters on what Peter Willes (in a recent book) has called "The New Communist Third World" are at a disadvantage as compared with those who write on the Soviet Union or most of the countries of Eastern Europe. This may be one - though not the only - reason why three of the best chapters are those by Ronald Hill on the Soviet Union, Alex Pravda on Czechoslovakia and George Schöpflin on Hungary. Hill and Pravda, though also intimately familiar with the primary sources, are comparatively well served by the writings of their fellow Western political scientists. Schöpflin, who has significantly less of a Western literary study on Hungarian politics to draw upon, has the knowledge of Hungarian sources and understanding of the way the system works not to be unduly disconcerted by the fact that few Western scholars outside the ranks of the Hungarian diaspora have ventured to write on Hungarian politics and society.

Not surprisingly, the individual authors differ in their political beliefs and in the values to which they accord highest priority. It is of interest in this regard to contrast the greater degree of academic detachment, by and large, of those contributors who write on the East European states with the higher level of commitment and revolutionary zeal of some of those who write on Asian states. Thus, Bill Brugger does not merely record certain of the changes which have taken place in China since Stalin's death, but indicates that he is less than happy about them. He suggests, with some reason, that Mao himself would have been "disturbed" by the way things are going, and while for Brugger "the economic strategy of 1978 still offers something far superior to what usually constitutes a development programme", he worries about whether it is recognizably "socialist".

What is, perhaps, a little more surprising is that Laura Summer, writing about Kampuchea in the period up until 1978, evinces no disquiet at all about the Pol Pot régime, whose domestic policies are said to have been dominated by "security and public health problems". Kampuchean developments in 1978 lead her to suggest that "the period of post-war crisis is over" and the notes that "visitors to the co-operatives have been impressed by the health of the population, the absence of tension or obvious surveillance and efforts by the government and co-operative authorities to construct houses for all families". On this evidence, Kampuchean studies would appear to have reached the point attained by Soviet studies some forty-five years ago when Beatrice and Sidney Webb ventured forth to the land of the soviets and found "a new civilization" in the midst of Stalin's purges. Laura Summer's difficulties are partly, of course, those of writing the contemporary history of countries in turmoil. Szajkowski finds it necessary to add a postscript following the Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea, in which he mentions some of the less attractive features of the dislodged Pol Pot régime. Indeed, one might venture a guess that when the definitive comparative study of the development of public health comes to be written, Pol Pot's promotion of public health will be judged to have less in common with the contribution of Edwin Chadwick than with that of Nikolai Yezhov.

The *Politics of Uranium* by Norman Moss (239pp. André Deutsch. £8.95. 0 233 97397 4) carries accounts of the location and exploitation of the main uranium deposits in the world, the material for the production of both nuclear energy and atomic weapons, the international cartel, arms proliferation, pollution control and the anti-nuclear movement.

UNITED STATES

Transports of delight

By Reynier Banham

DAVID BRODSKY:
L.A. Freeway
An appreciative essay
178pp, with 18 maps and 70 black-and-white illustrations. University of California Press. £12.50.
520 04068 5

In the first hot month of the fall ... Maria drove the freeway. ... And again she returned to an intricate stretch just south of the interchange, where successful passage from the Hollywood onto the Harbor required a diagonal move across four lanes of traffic. On the afternoon she finally did it without once braking or once losing the beat of the radio she was exhilarated, and that night slept dreamlessly.

Thus Joan Didion in what is now the most quoted passage she has written in *Play It As It Lays*. David Brodsky manages to avoid it until page 56 of *L.A. Freeway*, but quote he must. It seems to be the first truly effective literary metaphor constructed out of the Los Angeles townscape, after a series of overblown conceits too faintly built on more obvious tropes: *The Slide Area. Fault-line. Sunset Boulevard*, etc. Didion's metaphor of psychological survival skills (one of Maria's other personae "seemed to have the knack for controlling her own destiny") is cut from concrete experience, solid, resistant to falsification. Everyone who has executed that critical manoeuvre will instantly recognize its truth. So too, however, will readers of *Play It As It Lays* who have never visited the city, never driven a car.

This is not only a measure of Didion's craft as a writer, but also a measure of Los Angeles as a world city. Much as readers who have never visited Paris and have an intention of doing away with themselves will believe they understand why Gérard de Nerval's first idea on entering the Place de la Concorde was to commit suicide, so - mutants *mutatis* - they will believe they understand the mortal importance of that diagonal crossing of four lanes of traffic. If Didion's white amnesia of the soul is our modern equivalent of de Nerval's black *tristia*, then the topography of the freeways is becoming as much part of the furnishing of every cultivated mind as the topography of literary Paris. If the freeway system has imposed itself as the master metaphor of the rootless alienations and expendable pleasures that are supposed to be the same taken the city as a whole can serve as a generalized metaphor for the current human condition.

In a rather daring intellectual manoeuvre that confirms the new status of the freeways as established, not intrusive, Brodsky proposes that Los Angeles, just because of this massive investment in motorways, is better adapted to a mass-transit future than San Francisco, which got out of freeways a decade earlier and built the underground BART railway instead:

... with the possible exception of the downtown San Francisco financial district, BART has had little effect on urban form, especially in the suburban periphery of the Bay

The way in which the freeways have, in fact, imposed themselves in this role is instructive. They are probably less vital to Los Angeles than the Tube to London or the Metro to Paris - I recall once driving down Sepulveda towards the airport and realized that we had been in LA for five days, had visited every person or institution on our crowded programme, yet never set tyre to freeway the whole time. The freeways are only as necessary as Angelinos have made them. The city was not built around them; rather, they follow ancient and established corridors of transportation and branch the mountains by the same travellers, and they have only recently, though perhaps crucially, begun to affect the patterns of urbanization along their margins.

Yet the city has lusted after them since they were first mooted in the 1930s, and has been prepared to make addled sacrifices to get them. Only with the late decade of the 1960s, when the freeway, which still may not be built in its entirety, have the citizenry begun to ask whether they are worth the expense and the politics. By this time, inevitably, some of the earliest ones have acquired the status of historic landmarks, so that to negotiate one of the right-angled, 5-mph entries on to the Pasadena Freeway is to relive the prelapsarian innocence of the system's coy beginnings as the Arroyo Seco Parkway.

The whole historical process is set out, yet again, in Brodsky's "appreciative essay". The novelty of his study being that it is the first that can look back on the whole enormous civic enterprise as a completed design, near enough, like the Paris of Haussmann or the Rome of Sixtus V. For him - as for many of us - the Freeway system has fixed the form and confirmed the style of Los Angeles, and even were the Century Freeway built, nothing can alter the fact that the others were built, not in place, will not go away, and will probably have to provide the locations for whatever mechanisms of transport are supposed to succeed them.

Indeed, in a rather daring intellectual manoeuvre that confirms the new status of the freeways as established, not intrusive, Brodsky proposes that Los Angeles, just because of this massive investment in motorways, is better adapted to a mass-transit future than San Francisco, which got out of freeways a decade earlier and built the underground BART railway instead:

... with the possible exception of the downtown San Francisco financial district, BART has had little effect on urban form, especially in the suburban periphery of the Bay

Area. There have been none of the high-rise offices or apartments, none of the compact shopping malls or industrial parks which the freeway system has inspired in Los Angeles. ... Ironically, if the time should ever come when we really want a fixed rail transit system in Los Angeles, we will have not only the exclusive rights of build them on, but will also be much closer to an urban pattern appropriate to such a system.

There is more to this (perhaps slightly smug) assessment than meets the eye. Although one hears less of the old "Great Bores of Today" rhetoric about "senseless automobile-generated suburban sprawl" than used to be, most arguments about public transport still tend to assume that a city rationally (or even "naturally") based on fixed-rail rapid transit will be a different shape from one based on random automobile movement over freeways. In proposing, contrariwise, that it should be pretty well the same shape, Brodsky is flying an educated kite that ought to have been flown before mechanical urban transit ever began.

Primitive systems (with the blessed exception of London's Inner Circle) always fed radially into central-area congestion, and hoped to profit by it, and thus made it worse because practically every such system known to man is capable of generating more traffic than it can handle - see, for instance, what the Bakerloo and the Metropolitan between them have done for Finchley Road. The L.A. freeways avoided that classic congestion-trap by bypassing downtown instead of trying to penetrate it. As a result, downtown is boxed and defined by four major arteries that pass it on the way to somewhere else - much to the confusion of Europeans innumerable conditioned to believe that all important roads must lead to the Piazza Venezia, *Possibly Clap* or other conventional focal point.

It is probably too late for these lessons to be learnt anywhere but Akron, Keyes, by now, London, it seems, will be surgically pinched with cardiac-arrest by-passes like the Fleet and Jubilee lines, but not radically re-organized. Brodsky pursues the theme no further than San Francisco, but he does give a studiable picture of how Los Angeles may have sleepwalked into this unassailable truth. His essay in appreciation comes in three sections: one concerned with meanings and perceptions of freeway systems; the next with the physical history of transportation in the Los Angeles Basin; and the third an epilogue, with appendices and notes. The historical section crosses territory familiar to students of the case. Here again are the close tie-ups between railway promoters and real-estate developers; the conspiracy

theorists' tale of how the Pacific Electric Railway was destroyed at the behest of General Motors - and the oft-forgotten dates of how late LA died: 1961 and 1963, long after most British cities had scrapped their trams. And the predecessors and models for the Los Angeles system are duly noted; the German *Autobahn*, and the New York Parkway system of Commissioner Robert Moses, that darling of liberal opinion in the 1940s and 50s.

If all this history is fairly familiar, the preceding section of the book, entitled "Intuitions of Meaning", is less well trodden, even though it contains arguments pro and con that will be familiar to anyone who has ever been embroiled in a conversation about the transfer from over-crowded sections signposted as slow as 30 mph can, in fact, be taken at seventy, is very different from westward passage on the Santa Monica in the dark and in driving rain that conceals the road markings, so that only the feel of tyre on concrete can indicate what lane you are in, or the stately rush-hour formation-keeping, warily trustful of the drivers ahead, behind, and on either side, that brings rivers of glistening metal at a safe fifty-odd miles per hour to "the groves and fountains" of San Bernardino at the end of the day.

But is that experience truly single? To suppose it, as even Brodsky seems to do, is to miss the richness and variety that every true freeway buff knows. Something like a fast pass up the Pasadena at dawn, when it is discovered that sections signposted as slow as 30 mph can, in fact, be taken at seventy, is very different from westward passage on the Santa Monica in the dark and in driving rain that conceals the road markings, so that only the feel of tyre on concrete can indicate what lane you are in, or the stately rush-hour formation-keeping, warily trustful of the drivers ahead, behind, and on either side, that brings rivers of glistening metal at a safe fifty-odd miles per hour to "the groves and fountains" of San Bernardino at the end of the day.

Or - for me most illustrative of the vision the city lusted after - a sunny afternoon in the middle of the fuel crisis of 1973-74, at a time when a consensus of the citizenry believed that a fuel-thrifty thirty-five mph was the only way to go. Westbound on the Santa Monica again, rolling in open formation at this modest speed in a rented Buick of low chrome and with "the late great" Jim Croce singing "Candle in the Wind" on the radio, I divined for the first time the true depths of the freeway. Over the scrubbed palm trees of the surrounding suburbia I felt a sense of relaxation so powerful that I believed I could reconstruct the original vision of the freeway experience - painless movement at will through an ideal Middle Landscape of genteel habitation.

Brodsky cites Leo Marx (of "Middle Landscape" fame) on the subject of The Machine in the Garden. He could hardly do otherwise: here, for about ten minutes, the Machine and the Garden were of peace.

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126 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SD

Doctrine of the Doppers

By Kenneth Ingham

IRVING HEXHAM:
The Irony of Apartheid
The Struggle for National Independence
of Afrikaner Calvinism against
British Imperialism
239pp. New York and Toronto:
Edwin Mellen Press.

Is there anything new to be said about apartheid? Irving Hexham believes there is, though radical historians might think his argument peripheral if not positively perverse. While even the more liberal students of South Africa might wonder if he is seeking to put back the historiographical clock.

For Professor Hexham links the origins of apartheid not in the desire to exploit a docile labour force or in the wish to assert white supremacy but in a Christian-nationalist movement. He does not, however, make the mistake of assuming that Calvinism in South Africa is a monolithic structure or that Afrikaner nationalism is a seamless garment. For him apartheid originally drew its intellectual justification from the nineteenth-century Dutch neo-Calvinist movement and its nationalist impetus from an idealized interpretation of the history of the Transvaal.

The appeal to Dutch neo-Calvinism took place in 1857 when conservative Afrikaners, disturbed by the dilution of South African Calvinism through the infusion of evangelical doctrines, asked the Separated Christian Reformed Church, which had itself been founded in Holland to resist the liberalizing influence of French Revolutionary theories, to send a minister to assist them. Dirk Postma was the man selected, and the church which he founded in Pretoria, the Gereformeerde Kerk (Reformed Church), based its doctrines on the fundamental tenets of the Synod of Dort of 1618-19 and drew its congregation from a conservative group of Boers known locally as Doppers, of whom the most formidable was Paul Kruger.

It was the devastating effect of the second Anglo-Boer war, and the unifying policy that followed it, which, Hexham maintains, provided the conditions for the myth of apartheid to flourish. To the despising remnants of the Boer people the leaders of the Reformed Church proclaimed the former glory of a traditional faith, which God had enabled to affirm its own separate identity through victory over the measurably greater army of Zulus in the Battle of Blood River and over

the armed might of England at Majuba. It was the story of the children of Israel over again, the story of a chosen people, and it was told in prose and poetry written in the Afrikaans language, the true language of the Afrikaner people which hitherto had been held in little esteem because it had no literature. What was needed now, they claimed, if the Afrikaner nation was once again to take its place in the world, was for Afrikaners to honour their religion and reaffirm their separate identity. This they could begin to do by resisting Lord Milner's policy of introducing state education with its emphasis upon English culture and by insisting upon the religious responsibility of parents to see that their children were educated in their own faith and their own culture.

This, Hexham says, was a doctrine which won widespread support among people who in more prosperous times had been indifferent if not actually hostile to the conservatism of the Doppers, but who in their desperation found encouragement in the confident assertion of Afrikaner claims. Such people, Sinus and Bolt among them, when the economy recovered and when a tolerant Liberal government in Britain looked upon them kindly, were to desert the cause in order to cooperate with the English. In so doing they betrayed the Afrikaner ideal by diluting it, for

it was the English with their liberalizing ways and their casual attitude towards Christianity, not the unregarded Bantu, who at that critical stage embodied the greater threat to the separate identity of the Afrikaner nation. The "irony" of the title is thus already becoming apparent, though it reached its apogee in 1948, when the National Party which claimed to uphold the Afrikaner ideal reduced that ideal to travesty by converting apartheid, separation, into the mere assertion of white supremacy.

It is a fascinating theory and it carries conviction. For, by locating the true source of apartheid in the doctrines of the Christian Nationalist movement which, Professor Hexham admits, never comprised more than a small percentage of the Afrikaner people, it can be seen why the policy of the present government of South Africa wins the support of people of widely differing views. It is in fact an aberrant version of apartheid, demanding no allegiance to pure doctrine and capable of being interpreted to suit the ideas of the interpreter. Thus the Afrikaner Calvinist, who would find the wholehearted observance of the precepts laid down at the Synod of Dort unduly restrictive, can nevertheless see in his own prosperity, as compared with that of the Bantu, the just reward of predestination. The fact that other Whites who are not Calvinists may

also be seen to prosper need not be too closely investigated. Meanwhile, labour can support with equanimity a government which provides the conditions in which cheap labour abounds. Whether these attitudes are the product of inadvertent self-deception or of unashamed opportunism is irrelevant. Hexham's argument still stands.

It would have had an even greater impact upon the reader if the author could have imposed a more strictly chronological format upon the presentation of his case. The description of the origins of the Separated Christian Reformed Church, for example, from which the argument springs, comes halfway through the book. The thematic rather than the historical pattern which the author adopts does, in fact, lead to some confusion about the development of the myth of apartheid, a confusion that can certainly be dispelled by cross-checking, but might well have been avoided altogether. It would, nevertheless, be churlish to end a note of criticism, for this is undoubtedly a book which will make anyone interested in South Africa think very hard about his preconceptions. If Professor Hexham has put back the clock he has certainly put back to Greenwich Mean Time, to the true base of scholarly investigation.

The play of politics

By Dennis Walder

ATHOL FUGARD:
A Lesson from Aloes
79pp. Oxford University Press.
£2.95.
0 19 281307 2

ROBERT MSHENOU KAVANAGH
(Selector and Introduction)
South African People's Plays
Ons phala hl
Plays by Gibson Kente, Credo V. Mutwa, Mithull Shezi and Workshop
71p.

176pp. Heinemann. £2.95.
0 435 90224 5

Many people believe that politics are separate from literature. White South Africans are particularly prone to this delusion, and one can easily see why. It is more than a matter of convenience, or even of ignoring whatever threatens the status quo: it is a matter of survival. When Piet Bezuidenhout, the middle-aged Afrikaner at the centre of Athol Fugard's latest published play, begins to reminisce about the drought which drove him from his plantain farm to become a bus-driver in Port Elizabeth, English South African wife bursts out: "I suppose we'll be into politics next and the black man's misery." Well, no — not exactly. We are not in the world of *Slave Boy* or *Island*, of pass laws and life imprisonment on Robben Island. But we are in the world of uncertainty, pain and confusion in which all Fugard's characters live, their being and in which, despite everything, they are intent on surviving.

How to survive? A Lesson from Aloes seems to offer an answer in its metaphor which, like other such metaphors in Fugard (eg. *The Blood Knot*), is compelling and explicit in effect. The nice, that tenuous, indigenous plant which thrusts its thorny leaves and flame-like spears of flower through the most barren Eastern Cape soil, provides an apparently irresistible emblem, living survived where Piet has failed. He goes on to find "rain after a long drought" when accepted in a group of political activists in a bus boycott. But their suspicions of his later role, when the movement is broken by the police, have since condemned him to sit contemplating the collection of noise with which he has decorated his Algonkian backyard, proudly refusing to challenge his accusers. There

we find him, and there we leave him. What kind of survival is that? "An evil system isn't a natural disaster. There's nothing you can do to stop a drought, but bad laws and social injustice are man-made and can be undone by men." If we are to take Piet's words seriously, then nothing could be worse than his inactivity. Believed to be a traitor, his only friend driven by a banning order and a one-way "leave permit" into exile, his wife permanently hovering on the edge of an insanity induced by his police "rape" of her private diaries, he is effectively imprisoned, cut off from politics and — it comes to the same thing — reality.

It is unclear how far Fugard is aware of the implications of Piet's position. He has called the play "celebration" of the Afrikaner; it is dedicated to his mother, Elizabeth Potgieter; and in his introduction he appears to identify closely with the hero. He seems to be turning inward, towards a personal past (A Lesson in set in Port Elizabeth in 1963), a movement somewhat alarming in a playwright whose work has generally shown with great power and conviction the inextricability of private and public life. Is this the only way to survive as a white writer in South Africa? Are the only alternatives exile, madness or isolation? For a man of Fugard's isolation, perhaps.

Robert Kavanagh's very useful little anthology reveals a different world, although it is a world in which Fugard was once deeply involved — the world of the urban black "townships" or ghettos. White South Africans know little of this world, even less of its theatre. Yet it is central to the heart of the largest continental of the industrialized world of survival is being taught. There are no aloes in Soweto, but the highveld scrub clings doggedly to the street corners, its roots alive even when the winter frost has turned its leaves brown, and the wind has covered it with dust.

In Soweto, the struggle to survive involves a struggle to articulate. Hence most "township theatre" is fundamentally narrative — "here people, is our story, these are our lives." But it is a narrative expressed not so much in terms of the mainstream European tradition of character and plot and dialogue, as in image, movement and gesture. It is operative rather than realistic, as one of the best-known, indeed "classic" productions, *King Kong* (by Todd Matshikiza et al.) proved as long ago as 1959.

This is not to say that it cannot exist without music and dance, although they feature very often, especially in Gibson Kente's work; nor is it meant to suggest approval for the more crudely commercial and European-directed successors of *King Kong* with which overseas audiences have become familiar, such as *Ipi Tombi* or *Unabathu*; rather, this means that even the most obvious slice of "township" life, whether it shows a man desperately searching their pockets for their passes during a police raid, or *isobos* (young thugs) carrying away stolen goods, is expressed in a heightened, rhythmic form. These two examples of black Kente's *Too Late*, one of the four plays included in Kavanagh's collection, and first performed in the Moroko Hall, Soweto, in 1975. Kente, who says, "I write for the man in the street," has been the most popular and successful playwright for many years, although this has also meant his coming in for heavy criticism from the more "serious" or committed younger dramatists, not represented here, such as

Maisha Muponya and Mutsemeli Manuku, the creators of, respectively, *The Hunger* and *Egoli* (both recently on tour in fringe venues in Britain). *Too Late* was "political" enough for it to be banned, and Kente to be imprisoned, briefly; but he has since returned to the safer, not to say questionable territory of the government-controlled television service. This is unfortunate, since Kente is, in effect, a one-man drama school where there are no drama schools, a provider of experience and technical know-how where only those from the "white" theatre brave and far-sighted enough to cross the barriers — such as Barney Simon, of the Murrket Theatre in Johannesburg — can help; and such "help" is often, understandably, resisted or ignored.

The title of Kente's 1975 play is derived from the cry uttered at its conclusion: is it too late for the young, bitter and frustrated at the treatment meted out to them, to be curbed? The following year, in June 1976, the rising of the youth of Soweto supplied an answer; and it is this event, the effects of which con-

tinued to be felt throughout South Africa, that all the plays were created and performed in Soweto during the years immediately preceding the Soweto rising, and they are clearly specific to that period. Workshop 71's *Survival*, a brilliant piece of workshop theatre about prison life, was also banned; and *Shani*, which follows his unhappy student hero into a foreign guerrilla-camp and death, was cited in a "Black Consciousness" trial as an example of an "inflammatory, provocative, anti-white, racist, subversive and revolutionary play or drama". Only Credo Mutwa's dreamlike reworking of traditional myths, *uNasimela*, escaped the attempts of the authorities to crush these expressions of the new forces which arose in the cities to fill the vacuum left by the hangings of the post-Sharpeville era — perhaps because Mutwa, like some neglected vendors elsewhere in Africa, is a romantic, conservative visionary, looking to the past when the present presses too painfully, seeking an escape from "politics". But there is no escape.

Settling down

By Anthony Delius

PETER PHILIP:
British Residents at the Cape, 1795-1819:
Biographical Records of 4,800 Pioneers
484pp. Cape Town: David Philip.
£14.80.
Distributed in the UK by Oloboi Book Resources.
0 908396 46 5

South African history is today being considerably re-assessed in the light of much recent and ongoing research by American, European, and local scholars. The fresh look will undoubtedly take in two hundred years of British influences on South African affairs, including those of the 1820 Settlers, accepted as one of the founding fathers of the present 1,500,000 population.

Peter Philip's painstaking compilation, *British Residents at the Cape*

1795-1819, should be useful to researchers into British beginnings in South Africa, although its subtitle, "Biographical Records of 4,800 Pioneers", gives an impression of slightly up-staging the Settlers. Very few, probably less than a fifth, of those listed by Philip could be put in the same pioneer category as the constant largely of the usual flossism and jettison of colonial society. Governors, missionaries, officers, soldiers, sailors, missionaries, officers on further from hotter parts of the British Empire further east, would be traders in such goods as slaves, spirits, and ivory, quacks and drifters of several kinds, but scarcely pioneers.

One of the most remarkable of the highly regarded Dr James Barry, who in a stay of a dozen years became physician to the Forces and the High Tory Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, and was later reported to have been a woman. Another is a sergeant's wife, Elizabeth Salt, who saved a fort in danger of being overrun during the

Battle of Grahamstown by carrying a barrel of gunpowder to it through ranks of Xhosa warriors. Then, too, there was the spirited American wife of a former customs officer. When her husband had it proclaimed publicly that he was no longer responsible for her debts, Mrs Lewis immediately countered with a notice that she would, as hitherto, pay all debts she contracted "but will not be responsible for any that Mr J. Lewis may contract".

Intrepid readers who can brave brief biographies thick with abbreviations and references will be rewarded by getting some flavour of life at the Cape at that time from Philip's book. For instance, one Woolsey Mulson, Paymaster 81st Foot, offers as first prize in a lottery (200 tickets at 10 Riksdollars) "a healthy slave girl 15 years old". A Mr John Murray is ordered to remove his whaling ship from Robben Island because his boats tempted the other inhabitants of the island, "natives and political prisoners, to escape. In some ways the Cape has not changed much in a couple of centuries.

An antique disposition

By Julie Hankey

C. WALTER HODGES, S. SCHOENBAUM and LEONARD LEONE (editors):
The Third Globe
Symposium for the Reconstruction of the Globe Playhouse, Wayne State University, 1979
357pp. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. \$16.95.
0 8143 1680 8

By a bizarre transposition a chunk of London's past is soon to rise on the banks of the Detroit river, Michigan. At the end of the Wayne State University symposium, whose papers and main discussion points comprise this book, the mayor of Detroit and the president of the University declared a "civic commitment" to the reconstruction of a full-scale, semi-constructed replica of the second Globe Theatre, the thatched first Globe is too problematical) originally built in 1613 for Shakespeare's company, the King's Men.

No figures are mentioned, but since Glynne Wickham refers in passing to "several million dollars", it may be worth recording two questions from the floor and their answers. To the suggestion that Shakespeare and his colleagues might have kept up the chance of modern staging techniques, John Russell Brown's answer was that since Shakespeare's company toured and used many different stages and yet still repeated the first Globe arrangement after it was burnt down, "the odds are they were pretty eminent". Yes, but they hadn't seen, for example, electricity, just as Cooper hadn't seen a plume, so you can't conclude that they wouldn't have taken advantage of modern methods. Then to the question whether a modern audience could ever get to know how it behaved under the text and the audience, one which offers no mediating scenic picture or special lighting effects, and which has no way of dividing actor from audience, is what is needed now, by actors and the playwrights alike. Whether or not one agrees with this, the necessary connection between that view and the reconstruction of the second Globe remains obscure.

Minimally scenic barns, warehouses and roundhouses, with audi-

ences close in and on three sides (more or less), are after all common-place now. If it is important to have audience and actor in the same light, leave the house lights on. If the close, dark backstage quarters are, as he suggests, conducive to cast intimacy, they're easily arranged (and already there in many older theatres). If timber framing is desirable acoustically, that too needs no elaborate antiquarian research. It is as though there were something talismanic about the original building, as though by reproducing it down to the last crank-handle we would release some lost power.

Professor Brown makes much of the mysterious qualities of buildings, but the heart of what he is saying concerns actors and audiences (a subject upon which the rest of the symposium is frustratingly silent). A cardinal virtue in his scheme is that buildings should not get in the way. But far from fostering the direct reciprocity of the original Globe, an intricately decorated Renaissance monument in modern industrial America could hinder it. What was once a natural part of the scene, a modern building — glamorous certainly, but no more outlandish than the red-plush and mirrors of a Victorian pub were to the working man — will now be a palpable piece of scenery. The stage, once a neutral region for humanity "free-wheeling" between heaven and hell, as Bernard Beckerman describes it in his paper, will now proclaim seventeenth-century historicism from every oak panel. The actors, set off as they never were by their costumes, may just as well build themselves an entire Elizabethan set: the audience, brought up on modern versions of Globe-inspired sparseness, would be no freer in this reconstruction to ignore "inessentials" and concentrate on the acting.

Professor Brown casts a wistful look at football crowds, and talks of an expectant, waiting audience, "awash in the bibbos", free to eat, drink, applaud and heckle as the groundlings did. He wants some of them to be poor, and to come preferably in the afternoons. (Who will they be? Shiftworkers? Skiving apprentices, like the Elizabethan originals? Perhaps the unemployed from Detroit's collapsed car industry, will time to kill watching Shakespeare.) But if Shakespeare is to recover his place in the busy, busy of everyday life, it must be done with less scholarly advertisement than this. To recover the equivalent power of the original actors it may be necessary to avoid the same aims. As Professor Brown himself points out about a production of *The Double Dealer* at the Olivier: "paradoxically, the production seems much livelier and... closer to the effect of the original conditions of performance, while being further from them in method".

Significant splits

By Paul Taylor

COLIN N. MANLOVE:
The Gap in Shakespeare
The Motif of Division from Richard II to The Tempest
200pp. Viscio Press. £10.95.
0 85478 444 6

In common with a number of recent studies of Shakespeare, this book takes a combative issue with those anti-biographical critics whose wariness about psychology from a reading of the plays reduced his classic utterance in C. J. Sisson's 1934 British Academy Lecture, "The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare". For Colin Manlove, the "opposites and divisions" in the plays, which his book explores often so broadly and suggestively, point toward "a reality takes away from the edge of the latter". Does not the baselessness and arbitrariness of his (and Posthumus's) jealousy make the evil more terrible than that which can be explained away rationally? To deny this and to argue, as Manlove does, that the problem comedies have too much tragedy and the late plays too little, proceeding to the idea that this illustrates "a readiness to see life from one exclusive angle and a inability to reconcile contrary views" is illegitimate.

For all this, the book has extremely perceptive chapters on dividedness in *Othello*, *Leas and Coriolanus*, where the criticism forgets its broad claims and enters into tough and detailed analyses of individual plays.

Not is Manlove's general argument belied by a tendency to under-estimate the dramatic potency of the evil in the late plays. Leontes's jealousy, for instance, may be "baseless" but it is not therefore dramatically "ludicrous", as Manlove more than implies when he argues that the "insistence on the baseless and ludicrous nature of Leontes's jealousy as much as its reality takes away from the edge of the latter". Does not the baselessness and arbitrariness of his (and Posthumus's) jealousy make the evil more terrible than that which can be explained away rationally? To deny this and to argue, as Manlove does, that the problem comedies have too much tragedy and the late plays too little, proceeding to the idea that this illustrates "a readiness to see life from one exclusive angle and a inability to reconcile contrary views" is illegitimate.

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Measure for measure

By Julie Kavanagh

ALAN BRISSENDEN:
Shakespeare and the Dance
145pp. Macmillan. £12.
0 333 28523 9

Dance was a valuable theatrical and metaphorical device which Shakespeare, mostly in the comedies and late plays, exploited to the full. He saw that, as an ideographic and romantic art, it could be a means of "slipping fantasies that apprehend more than cool reason ever comprehends" — could vivify the artificiality of a genre in which people are miraculously transformed and convened, and gods can appear. With pattern and order among its fundamental aspects, dance could also validate implausibly symmetrical plots, providing the sense of an ending.

But Shakespeare's symbolic use of a final dance is not over-idealistic and inclusive, as for example Ben Jonson's was in the court masque. When the Jacobean masquers descended and took the hands of men of the audience, the gesture was meant to emblemize the harmonious transformation of the whole court. In Shakespeare, there are notable absences from the dances that end the plays. In *Much Ado* and *As You Like It*, neither Don John nor Jacques takes part, and this emphasizes their alienation from the new society either through old pattern or through intransigence. While in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is only the fairies who join hands in the last dance, the mortals having separate revels. Puck, an outsider, is likewise excluded, though his plea for applause — "Give me your hands, if we be friends" — may punningly allude to the concordant final dance in the court masque.

At the end of *The Tempest*, moreover, Shakespeare does confound the boundaries between the performers and the audience. When Prospero compares the insubstantial pageant on a stage with reality itself, he deliberately draws audience and actors together. But if masques attest to the extraordinary power of dance and spectacle to integrate people, Prospero's disruption of the masque of dancing naiads and reapers in Act IV becomes a direct challenge to this claim: what we are made aware of by Prospero's recollection of the "foul conspiracy" is the ineffectuality of entertainment to alter reality and transform people.

While Alan Brissenden acknowledges this aspect of the masque's influence on *The Tempest* he does not fully allow for the fact that Shakespeare may have intended these references to look beyond the play; after all, *The Tempest* is in many ways a debate with the court

masque. There is obviously room for development here, which points to a central weakness in his book: that it reads like an inventory. Often, in his anxiety to point out the pervasiveness of dance imagery in Shakespeare, his argument becomes only an accumulation of examples and quotations to which ideas are subjugated and left unexplored. The format, of chapters following the generic division of the plays, probably does not facilitate an interpretive approach. But the author could still be more discriminating with his material. Where dance has only peripheral relevance to the plays — as in the tragedies — lengthy discussions pad out what would otherwise be a scanty chapter. For example, his two-page exposition as to why Amazons appear in the masque in *Titus Andronicus* cites substantial passages of Sidney, Spenser, Rabelais, only to conclude superfluously that Amazons were thought to be "belligerent, unfeminine and destructive".

Much of the book's value lies in the way Brissenden's technical knowledge of sixteenth and seventeenth-century dance sheds light on certain verbal nuances that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, Richard's description of himself as "unshap'd for sportive tricks" carries a reference not only to copulation but to a technical term in dance: intricate steps in the galliard were known as "tricks". Or there is the "additional gibe" Brissenden detects in a line from the Duke of Bourbon in *Henry V*:

They bid us to the English dancing schools
And teach lavoltas high and swift corantos.
Saying our grace is only in our heels
And that we are most lofty run-aways.

In the volta, women were lifted high in the air by their partners, so the word "lofty" in the last line carries with it an accusation of effeminacy (suggesting a reversal of roles in the dance) as well as of cowardice.

Elsewhere, however, Brissenden surely over-estimates the capacity of even contemporary audiences to discern connotations in the text. Does Richard III's mention of the "piping time of peace" really call to mind the pipe and tabor of the morris dancer as well as the shepherd's pipe, and so provide a contrast to the prince's deformity? With considerable thoroughness Alan Brissenden has opened up what is undeniably a key subject, so it is a pity that all too often he lets in trivial ingenuity like other.

A new annotated edition of *The Knights of Ariadaphanes* has recently appeared (220pp. Warminster: Arts and Philology. £12. 0 85668 177 6). Distributed in the UK by La Haute Books, 10 West Lodge, Haulle, Jersey, CI. The translation, by the editor, Alan H. Sommerstein, appears on facing pages to the Greek text, and the play forms Volume 2 of a projected complete edition of the eleven surviving comedies of Aristophanes.

Watershed

The Bow River. Bow River.
Three men in his anecdote.
One with an artificial leg.
Were heading for rapids in a boat
On the Bow River. Or wherever.
Vague memories of lake and muskeg
In the Arctic Watershed
Looked for a Bow to redicover,
Is that in Canada? I said.

Rocky Mountains. Banff, Alberta.
I know it, yes, and Lake Louise.
A girl, the current and a canoe
Are moving with me past dark trees
Once more into the unlit future
Fifteen or sixteen summers ago
One summer evening, almost night,
On cold coppery-green melt-water
Which I thought I would never forget.

Duncan Forbes

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The Christian metaphor

By John Barnard

VINCENT NEWBY (Editor):
The Pilgrim's Progress - Critical and
Historical Views
302pp. Liverpool University Press.
£12.
0 8523 194 X

JOHN BUNYAN:
The Holy War
Edited by Roger Sharrock and James
F. Forrest
288pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford
University Press. £25.
0 19 81887 2

"I preached what I felt, what I smartly
did feel, even that unifier
which my poor soul did groan and
tremble to astonishment." Bunyan,
both as a writer of religious fiction
and as a preacher, wanted to make
his audience "smartingly feel" the
astonishment of God's grace. *The
Pilgrim's Progress* was meant to save
its reader's soul. Its fictional de-
vices have the self-concealing sophis-
tication of "naïve" and, in this case,
popular art. As Philip Edwards says
in *The Pilgrim's Progress: Critical
and Historical Views*, the latest addi-
tion to the Liverpool English Texts and
Studies, "The unsophisticated reader
can probably find his way without
help, but the critic is advised to carry
a proper map."

The critical approaches in the present
volume are impressively varied:
all display a keen awareness of the
complexities of the work's narrative
form and of the problems it sets for
the secular critic. Several writers take issue
with, or develop their arguments from,
Stanley Fish's belief that Bunyan does
everything he can to subvert the
metaphor of "progress": since the
Calvinist belief in prevenient grace
gives a fore-ordained ending, the plot's
progressive structure is at fundamental
odds with what it says. Brian Nellist
writes interestingly on the resultant
"fractures" in the narrative and ap-
peals to the kind of allegory that

Bunyan developed. Philip Edwards
points out that "progress" carries not
the modern sense of "improvement"
as fish assumes, but that of travelling
from place to place - hence Bunyan's
central metaphor is that of the journey.
Nick Shrimpton shows that the change
from pilgrim to military metaphors in
"House Beautiful" signals a change
from linear progression to one of
incessant struggle.

Both positions reveal the inade-
quacy of Fish's analysis. Perhaps the
most decisive answer is provided by
Nick Davis, who, like other writers
in this volume, looks back to
medieval literature. The strong
progressive effect of *The Pilgrim's
Progress* on any reader innocent of
Fish's reading comes about because
the deep structure of Bunyan's fiction
takes over patterns common to folk
tales and the popular versions of
chivalric romances. Davis's pro-
cedure is descriptive and analytic,
avoiding large generalizations about
folk literature, and concentrates on
establishing the originality of Bun-
yan's narrative form. David Mills
compares Bunyan with Langland,
claims that the balance of forces in
Man, is, for Bunyan, as much a
psychological and spiritual as a
consequent tension between the
clematic and literal levels. The
discontinuities of the literal narrative
also appear in the oddities of the
work's topography which derive,
James Turner suggests, from those of
a literature of the "dispossessed", in
which seventeenth-century England
is seen through God's Logos.

All the contributors, to a greater
or lesser extent, are faced by the
problem of belief. Vincent Newby
claims that the issue of Bunyan's Cal-
vinist faith is "surely... how, pre-
cisely, are we to relate to a work
seemingly so firmly rooted in
assumptions that are in general no
longer assumed?" Newby's own
answer, in a wide-ranging essay, is
that in confronting the religious and
theological element in the book the
reader "becomes aware", surprisingly
enough, of a certain anti-religious

tendency in the work. The Protes-
tant emphasis upon self, and the fact
that "no fictionalist is to secularise",
mean that whatever Bunyan's inten-
tions, his fascinated and shrewd
observation of Christian's inner life
makes him "more the celebrant of
man and experience than God and
absolute Truth". Newby's essay
raises and explores large general
issues but is also a sensitive reading
of the text. Gordon Campbell's
rather limited claim that Bunyan
reaches beyond a sectarian audience
by minimizing or excluding his more
extreme beliefs is, however, flawed
by a denial that the "roll" given to
Christian symbolizes his "assurance"
of election. In fact, in the seven-
teenth century assurance carried a
Calvinist theological meaning
("assurance of salvation") from 1622:
"to assure the heart of the elect."
Characteristically, the word is at
once concrete and theologically cor-
rect.

The volume also places Bunyan in
his seventeenth-century context.
Brent Hammond shows how Bun-
yan's continuation of the medieval
homiletic tradition encompasses con-
temporary satire. On a number of
occasions the parallel with Milton is
drawn, and Bernard Beatty's com-
parison of Bunyan's allegory with
Dryden's neglected beast fable, *The
Hind and the Panther*, rightly brings
together writers too often treated as
existing in wholly different worlds.

S. J. Newman's "Bunyan's Soli-
tude" - an essay rather than an essay
- also sets Bunyan against Augustan
literature. Ambitious, witty and well
written, it is likely to provoke either
irritated disagreement or excited
recognition. He sees *The Pilgrim's
Progress* as the "last significant
product of English religious folk
vision" - the most important
focus of English folk life between
Shakespeare and Dickens. In this
reading, Dryden and the Augustans
reduce the "truth of poetry" to "poet-
ic truth". The disembodying English
folk culture and impoverishing litera-
ture down to our own time. While
the use of "folk" seems more bonor-
ific than precise, Newman's essay
like the volume as a whole, demon-
strates the importance of Bunyan as
a writer who challenges both the
accepted orthodoxies of literary his-
tory and a critical vocabulary de-
veloped to deal with deliberately
literary works. Bunyan's popular art
is neither naïve nor simple.

Tiller of truth

By Paula Neuss

MARGARET E. GOLDSMITH:
The Figure of Piers Plowman
The Image on the Coin
128pp. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer.
£12.
0 85991 077 6

"There is unexpectedly little about
agriculture as such in *Piers Plow-
man*", so why is Piers a ploughman,
Margaret Goldsmith asks. If his func-
tion is to symbolize Christ the hum-
ble working man, why not Piers the
Carpenter, or like St Peter, Piers
the Fisherman? One answer might be
that neither of these trades would fit
into Langland's alliterative line. Dr
Goldsmith suggests that while car-
pentry and fishing are activities that
"belong to the real world" - the
activities of ploughing, gardening,
jousting, reaping are not labours that
Jesus and his disciples actually en-
gaged in: these unhistorical actions
force a symbolic reading not bound-
ed by time.

The starting point of Goldsmith's
argument is the final manifestation of
Piers in the "Dobest" section, where
with a town of "four grete oxen"
(Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)
and "four stotes" (the learned doc-
tors Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory
and Jerome). The Evangelists and
the Church Fathers thus help Piers to
"fill truth" and sow the seeds of the
Cardinal Virtues in man's soul.
Goldsmith thinks that this kind of
metaphor makes "unappealing poet-
ry" (or suspects that other critics
think so) but she argues that the
"mode of Piers' literary being" de-
rives partly from these learned
sources, especially from St Augus-
tine's writing. Augustine's emphases
on the need to love Truth and to
learn the meaning of Love have
heavily influenced Langland, and

"certain associations of texts
favoured by Augustine have sug-
gested submerged trains of thought
beneath the surface of *Piers Plow-
man*". For example, Piers' anger
with Truth's pardon, and his tearing
is apart may recall the anger of Au-
gustine as the inward meaning of the
text "be angry and sin not" in Psalm
4 strikes him. He reads in this psalm
that he must "sacrifice" his old self
spiritual joy. Here Goldsmith com-
pares Piers's decision to stop sowing,
not be so busy about his "bely joy"
and take up a plough of prayers and
penance instead.

Much of this book is illuminating,
but the argument is difficult to fol-
low. Perhaps Dr Goldsmith really
wanted to write a book about the
influence of Augustine and the other
"doctors" on Langland's thought but
feared this might be unpopular. She
finds it necessary to apologize for her
careful scholarship: "It is my inten-
tion to avoid pedantry as far as I
can" but "I find myself obliged to
employ some Latin expressions
and to examine certain features of
Latin phrasing on occasion". But
why should she? There are a lot of
Latin phrases in the poem and she is
very good at explaining them. She
gives a convincing interpretation of
the notorious crux "half a leunge
lyne in Layn", for example, relating
it to Augustine's discussion of the
grammar of the verb "to love" in
Trinitate. This has nothing to do with
the figure of Piers, however, and the
section seems a digression until one
realizes what her book is really ab-
out. Interestingly, she requires us to
read her own work rather as she
suggests we might read *Piers Plow-
man*, looking for the "subject". She
seems guilty about wanting to write
"what has come to be known as
patristic criticism" and this is a pity,
because we could certainly do with
more of it, and more scholarly work
on Langland generally. "There are
books ynowe! To telow men what
Piers is", as Langland might have
said.

Genes and genealogy

By Brian Southam

DAVID WALDRON SMITHERS:
Jane Austen in Kent
144pp. Westerham, Kent: Hurtwood
Publications. £7.95.
0 903696 207
Limited edition of 100 copies, num-
bered and signed by author; £25.
0 903696 215

Connoisseurs of Jane Austen's let-
ters will also know that her pen was
never sharper or more acute than
when reporting on the old county
families of East Kent, "the elegant
tribe" portrayed in *The Beguiled
Legends*. This was the world she
entered at the invitation of her
brother Edward, who was translated
by adoption out of the rather less
elegant "tribe" of the Austens.
David's book is invaluable in helping
us to understand these nuances of
social grouping, social distance and
the prosperous isolation of the very
rich and landed. His analysis of her
family connections and associations is
an ample footnote to the society of
the novels themselves.

Merely, it is a far from
academic footnote. Jane Austen once
called Kent "the only place for
happiness". Sir David observes the
spirit of her observation. And at a
time when the scholarly apparatus
cranks so noisily across her pages,
Jane Austen would be amused to
find that the author of this fine little
book is indeed a Professor - yes, in
the best tradition of the scholar-
amateur, not a Professor of Litera-
ture but a radiologist of world re-
nown.

*Literature, Language and Society in
England 1530-1680*, a collection of
essays by David Aers, Bob Hodge
and Gunder Aker, has recently
appeared (217pp. Dublin: Gill and
Macmillan. £15. SDN 7171 0978 X
Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble. 0 389
21987 7). The volume includes essays
by Hodge on "Marlowe, Marx and
Machivelli" and "Satan and the Re-
volution of the Saints", and by Aers
and Kress on "Milton on Sex and
Marriage".

FRANCE

Psychoanalysing pussy

By Patrick Lindsay
Bowles

DEBETTE EYLAT:
Le Psy-chat
230pp. Paris: Laffont.
£21.00/25.9

This volume, devoted to the
psychoanalysis of cats and of cat
owners, is published, through either
a miracle or a misunderstanding, in a
distinguished series which includes
titles by Erich Fromm, Bruno
Bettelheim and Dorothy Bloch. De-
spite the presence of words like "fun-
ction", "desir" and "inconscient"
and a single reference to Jung,
however, no psychoanalytic categori-
es may really be said to be brought
into play in it. This is rather a pity,
for, theoretically at least, a
psychoanalytic study of cats should
have been no less possible, and is
certainly far less impracticable, than
say, Gaston Bachelard's "psycho-
analysis" of the elements. Although
Ghette Eylat touches upon subjects
as various as table manners, Aristis-
tic Pueria, city catnapping and the
fall of Man, *Le Psy-chat* consists
essentially of a series of "poetic" re-
flections on her own cat, and on
feline domesticity ("Voilà la volée
zèbre mon mignon, la voilà", to
the ineffable "chat noir anii, mon
reflet, mon ange, tu nous permets
d'être des vilains sans mot dire, en
mon impunité"). To the oecological
Bachelard est mort. Bérulle, notre
petit-fils-chat, Il est mort de notre
civilisation...".

As a result of this approach, which
suggests the psycho-analysis of
Bachelard rather lazily revised and
corrected by Walt Disney and
Chélie, a number of intriguing, and
probably true, claims made by the
author - remain unjustified, un-
supported as they are by any real
evidence. For example, she insists on

a connection between disliking cats
and disliking women, and describes
typical cat-owners as social outcasts,
"les ayants-presque-droit". These
assertions might easily have been
confirmed by referring, for example,
to the sociolinguistic history of the
relatively recent pun on the word
" chatte", or to the data available
from so-called "pet psychologists".
If, as Mme Eylat puts it, "un peu
d'anthropomorphisme ne fait de mal
à personne", it can also lead to the
most execrable complacency: "Il est
des êtres vivants qui semblent polar-
iser nos réactions les plus vives, les
plus irrationnelles... pour ma part,
j'en connais trois sortes: les chats, les
femmes, les juifs."

Paving one's way through this
volume, one soon discovers, then,
that it is a matter not so much of
feline psychology as of feline ap-
petites, which is itself a minor
branch of theriophily, or the belief
that animals are superior to, or hap-
pier than, human beings. Feline ap-
petites differs little from other
varieties of theriophily, or the belief
(Years lunged to be "Cold and dumb
and deaf as a fish", the simon
[O'Neill on apes: "Sure, you're a
heist off"), the theriophilic (Shel-
ley on birds: "Teach me half the
gladness that thy brim must know...
the cruetness [Eliot on lobsters: "I
should have been a pair of ragged
claws / Scuttling across the floors of
silent seas"), or the canine (Marston
on dogs: "For aught I know he knew
as much as I"). The point of this is
simply that there are as many
varieties of theriophily as there are
animals: be it a hamper or a camel,
an echidna or a bat, man cannot be
favourably compared with any crea-
ture, much less with the splendid
domestic puss here in question.

The cat, Mme Eylat reminds us, is
intelligent, elegant, tidy, gentle,
clean, neither too large, nor too
small, and "jamais ridicule". Man
slovenly; the cat, "au contraire, est
bâti comme un utérus". Homi sa-
piens, that pathetic chronophobe, is

Papa in the dock

By Robin Buss

ZOE OLDENBORG:
Le procès du rêve
300pp. Paris: Gallimard. 72fr.
2 07 02964 4

Forced into an lottery which is not
of their choosing children undergo a
regime of tenderness and tyranny
which leaves them as best they can
informed and most partial witnesses
to their parents' characters and pre-
sumptions. Guardians of their post-
humous survival, in *Le procès du
rêve* Zoe Oldenburg builds up a
powerful indictment of her Russian
father while ironically revealing his
central part in the development of
her literary talent. Serge Olden-
bourg, a historian and journalist who
encouraged his children's love of
books, but made the life of the fam-
ily revolve around the production of
stories and feuilletons for which Zoe
and her sister Hélène had to provide
regular anonymous contributions.

At the start, this helped to pre-
pare their command of Russian, as
well as offering entertainment in the
days before television. Soap opera
but as they moved into adolescence,
the atmosphere of this writers' work-
shop became increasingly charged.
As if the Rev Patrick Brontë
had invented Agnès and Gondal,
Zoe and Hélène used their writing
to establish on which to play out
the family's continuing supremacy in
the arts. By the time Zoe was in
her late teens, this conflict had come
to the fore in the "adventures" of her
novels, and it is largely through a
series of fictional tales and a tor-
ment of her family and the loosening of
the fathers hold on reality.

Her indictment of him is so power-
ful that, despite her denial, it is
bound to suggest a régime of
tyranny. She sees him as capricious,
tyrannical and essentially weak,
though protected by a deep-rooted
indifference: one of those whom "on
ne craint pas de frapper parce qu'on
les sent peu vulnérables". But what
matters chiefly to her is her father's
literary persona and her need to
fulfil her own vocation without suc-
cumbing to his fatal "tendresse au
rêve".

The fact that more than forty
years after his death she can still
recount in such detail the extra-
vagant saga of "Myllite Lammore"
is evidence of the pull exercised by her
father's imagination. Paradoxically, it
is Zoe, the historical novelist, who
claims to write only what she knows
in herself to be true, and Serge, the
historian, whom she accuses of
fleeing reality (while accepting that
his biography of Nicholas II is
"scrupulously honest", based on
painstaking research and deserving of
its reputation). The notebooks in
which he recorded the story of
"Myllite Lammore" survive only in
her memory, like Serge, already de-
composing before he was buried,
himself no more now than a charac-
ter of fiction, but the creator of his
creator, elector of the judge before
whom he stands trial and, more than
anyone, responsible for forming the
instrument of his impeachment.

Four recent additions to the "Critical
Guides to French Texts" series,
under the general editorship of Ro-
ger Little, Wolfgang Van Emden and
David Williams, published by Grant
and Cutler, 11 Buckingham Street,
London WC2, are: J. P. Little's *Beck-
ett: En attendant Godot and Fin de
partie*, 83pp. £1.80. 0 7293 0104 4
David Coward's *Duras: Miroir
vibrant*, 80pp. £1.80. 0 7293 0107 9
Vivienne Mylne's *Diderot: Le Re-
gime*, 72pp. £1.80. 0 7293 0106 0,
and Donald Adamson's *Balzac: Illu-
strations perdues*, 80pp. £1.80. 0 7293
0105 2.

Concentrated life

By Anne Whitmarsh

JEAN CAYROL:
11 Échec Fols Jean Cayrol
209pp. Paris: Seuil.
2 02 00446 9

A prolific novelist, and one of the
earliest exponents of the *nouveau
roman*, with which this book has
certain affinities, Jean Cayrol has
also published several volumes of
poetry and collaborated in making
films, notably with Alain Resnais in
Amour. Nevertheless he is little
known to English readers. These
autobiographical reflections do not
provide an easy introduction. It is for
the reader to piece together a
personality which emerges only par-
tially from what Cayrol himself re-
cognizes as a mere outline sketch of
himself and his past: "Ce n'est pas
telling all, indeed that would be
totally out of character for this shy
and private man who has jealously
guarded his life from the public gaze.
But the essence is there."

The most moving part of this book
is his restrained account of an experi-
ence which marked him profoundly:
three years in a concentration camp.
We learn little directly about the
camp, much more about his sense of
guilt at surviving the war, his isola-
tion and depression. The archetypal
hero of his novels is an extension of
himself at the time, dispossessed,
alone, rootless, a ghost raised from
the dead, condemned to a human
condition which is only a less ex-
treme form of the camp. "L'homme

concentrationnaire". For Cayrol the
way out of this nightmare was
through film-making, travel and writ-
ing, which eventually led to dialogue
and hope. While he insists that the
writer must be a witness to his times
and never cut himself off from the
world about him, we are nevertheless
conscious of his delight in the magic
of words as mere verbal image suc-
ceeds another. Writing for personal
pleasure or self-justification ("J'écris,
donc je suis") is not excluded.

Cayrol avoids the straitjacket of
the chronological format. Whenever
he attempts it, he says, he loses all
sense of time for in his mind one
image superimposes itself upon
another. In fact it is more positive
than this: he was one of the first to
use in novels and in film the tech-
nique of the dislocation of time and
space in which past, present and
future are fused, and so it is not
surprising to find him rejecting as
unrealistic the subdivision of exist-
ence into a set sequence. Memories,
uncoloured, fragments of his life are
grouped together thematically with
comments, questions, reflections on
himself and his writing, about which
he has interesting things to say.
There is little attempt at self-ana-
lysis. Aware of the temptation to pre-
sent a selective and cosmetic picture,
he adopts instead a tentative,
exploratory approach, asking more
questions than he answers.

Although by the end the author
has begun to come to life, he
remains ill-defined and infuriatingly
incomplete. So much is missing ur-
merely hinted at that without prior
knowledge of Cayrol this book is
insufficient. Yet it holds enough
promise to make the reader wish to
explore further.

Poet of sensibility

By Imre Salusinszky

RICHARD WENDORF:
William Collins and Eighteenth-
Century English Poetry
272pp. University of Minnesota
Press: distributed in UK by Trans-
atlantic Book Service. £16.25.
0 8166 1058 4

Collins's major poems are few, and
so are the facts we have of his short,
unhappy life. As a result, he is usually
mentioned as simply one of that
group of which Housman said, "They
were mad": the Bards of Sensibility
who culminated in Blake. The aim of
Richard Wendorf's study, however,
is more to individualize Collins than
to contextualize him, and this he
achieves through subtle readings of
all of Collins's poems. There is no-
thing at all innovative in Wendorf's
method, but his objective, clearly
written study is a fine introduction to
a somewhat neglected poet.

Many detailed points of contention
are clarified, particularly in a long
discussion of the famous "Ode on the
Poetical Character". The figure of
Apollo in the poem - the "rich-
haired Youth of Morn" - does not,
says Wendorf, represent the poet, as
much as a "middle-ground" figure,
who connects the mortal with the
divine and "inspires the poet, lending
him his imaginative spark". It is
fashionable to read the Ode as no
expression of Collins's anxiety over
the influence of Milton. The main
importance of Milton for Collins,
argues Wendorf, is as a "traditional
source of inspiration" that would en-
able him to evade the more troubling
influence of Pope.

Collins's departures from Augus-
tinian tradition, we are told, are more
considerable than those of Thomson,
Akenaide or Joseph Warton. We are

able to identify in Collins all the
usual presentiments of Romanticism.
Collins's main subject is the poet's
own creative power, which is associ-
ated with that of God. Nature is no
longer a pre-ordained model, but
what in "The Manners" is called a
"shifting Image". This produces
poetry of Longinian process, rather
than of Aristotelian product, wherein
the poet becomes fully absorbed into
his subject, as in the "Ode to Pity":
"Let me oft, retir'd by Day,
In Dreams of Passion melt away,
Allow'd with Thee to dwell."

Wendorf is sceptical both of Col-
lins's supposed "madness" end of
Johnson's "Poor Collins" tag, which
has certainly stuck. The madness,
however it was, occurred after the
poems were written, and is not
hinted at in them. The elements of
melancholy and anxiety in the
poems, on the other hand, are per-
sonal of literary convention, not pro-
ducts of derangement.

Nevertheless, what little we know
of Collins - and it is all marshalled
here - is mostly sad. William Smith,
a school-friend of the poet at Win-
chester, remembered him once suf-
fering of depression at school, in con-
sequence of a dream. In it, said
Collins, he had fallen out of a tree,
and this occasioned ridicule from his
contemporaries: "he was asked how
he could possibly be affected by this
common consequence of a school-
boy's adventure, when he did not pre-
tend, even in imagination, to sleep,
to have received any hurt." He re-
plied, that the Tree was the Tree of
Poetry."

Volume 9 of *Browning Institute Studies*
(207pp. Browning Institute/City
University of New York. 0092 4725)
includes an account by John O. Wad-
sworth of "Five letters of Matthew
Arnold to George Stovin Venables
together with articles on Colquhoun,
Hardy and Meredith."

A Gascon in Paris

By Nicolas Barker

CHARLES SAMARAN:
Enfance et Jeunesse d'un Centenaire
163pp. Paris: Les Belles Lettres. 71 fr.
2 251 39000 6

Charles Samaran was born on
October 28, 1879 on a farm in the
Armagnac; he attended the lycée at
Auch; studied at the Ecole des
Chartes and the Ecole des Hautes
Etudes from 1897 to 1901, when he
won a place at the Ecole Française at
Rome, returning in 1903 to a post in
the Archives. There he should later
become director of studies and pro-
fessor at the Ecole des Hautes
Etudes and director honoraire of the
Archives is hardly surprising, or, at
the ripe age of seventy-two, Presi-
dent of the Comité Internationale de
Paléographie. That was thirty years
ago, yet Charles Samaran is still
here, not merely alive but active, to
recount his early days, a period and
way of life that now seem
immeasurably remote.

His 102 years are by no means the
most remarkable of Samaran's
achievements. As a medievalist and
paleographer he will be remem-
bered for his work on Merovingian
charters (which are wickedly hard to
read) and on the papal finances in
France. But he has also written
memorably on Casanova and Balzac
and on his fellow-Gascon, D'Arag-
nan (he has never lost touch with his
native district, in the past or pre-
sent). It is, then, with a wide know-
ledge of his country and a fine feel-
ing for its language that Samaran has
now addressed himself to the time
and places of his youth.

His childhood, spent on a remote
farm at Cyprières in the Gers, is
vividly evoked, with scraps of the
local dialect that recall how many
Romance languages besides French
were still spoken in France. Samaran's
grandmother spoke only
Gascon, and Paul Meyer, director of
the Ecole des Chartes when he
joined it, corresponded with Mistral
"dans la langue de Mireille". Crayencres
was, of necessity, self-

sufficient; it lived off its own crops
and beasts, together with an amazing
variety of game. More complicated
needs were met by local craftsmen:
smiths, weavers and the loom-draw-
er who worked in a hoot on market
day, the hawls-drawn by an active
drummer outside. The staple of life
was the *piegradi*, the local wine
that grew everywhere and made the
good wine of Languedoc and, dis-
tilled (a process described in fascinat-
ing detail), the still better Armagnac
brandy.

There, one feels, Samaran might
be still, but for the curse that struck
the *vignerons* towards the end of the
last century: his whole career, from
the lycée onwards was, as he says
ironically, "un sous-produit du
phylloxera". The lycée at Auch pro-
duced some lively vignettes, not least
of the master, Louis Bellanger, who
set him on the road to higher learn-
ing. Patia, reared only after a long
and complicated journey was still
despite the new Eiffel Tower and the
violent upheavals of Haussmann,
much as it had been under the *ancien
régime*, particularly the Marais, re-
deux, Frances-Bourgeois, where the
Ecole des Chartes then was. It was a
good period for French scholarship:
the followers of Michélet were re-
writing French history with a pas-
ionate interest in its documents, in
which the newly founded Ecole had
an important part. Not only profes-
sors but writers and politicians
(Hérelle, Anatole France, Hano-
aux, Pelletan) were among its pro-
ducts. Mayer, Elie Berger, Robert
de Lasteyrie, taught there, and the
Ecole des Hautes Etudes (founded
1888) liberally expanded the educa-
tion of its pupils, who could choose
their subject and master at will. The
Bibliothèque Nationale and the Ar-
chives further expanded Samaran's
knowledge and acquaintance, includ-
ing the short but leonine Léopold
Délisle as well as the more eccentric
if learned readers.

Rome provided a brief but golden
exile from all this. No one who
loves the glory of the Palazzo
Farnese and its still more glorious
site should miss this description of its
palmey days and of its director, the
Abbe Duchesne, with his powerful
and sonorous cat. But to come back
to the Archives, in the Palais Souhai-
e forgotten.

and the Hôtel Geoffroy d'Assy, on
the corner of the rue des Francs-
Bourgeois, was now a *relais en ber-
cel*. It was not the great repository
of national documents of today (nor
was the Ministère Central, even in
exile). But the *Annuaire de la Fer-
me* (still existing though now superseded
by a modern strongroom) already
contained Louis XV's diary for 1789,
with "Rien" against July 14, the
platinum scales for the metre and
kilogram, and other treasures. The
stiff, some twenty-five in all, were
none of them stereotyped bureau-
crats, most of all Emile Campardon,
chef de la Section judiciaire, whose
theatrical upbringing had left him
with an irrepressible curiosity about
the theatre of human life which led
him sometimes too far up the back-
stage of the Marais, *au port de se-
fahre "argumenter"*, provoking the
ire of the censure.

The Archives was also the centre
for much serious and important
work. But in these vignettes of a
time long past that Samaran delib-
erately leaves with his readers, only
a few weeks before he arrived, Ver-
laine had staggered up the hill to
St-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas, bellowing
imprudently, "La confession, non de-
Dieu! Moréas still held court at La
Vachette, Le d'Harcourt, and La
Source. The *floures* (of which Xnor
made his famous song) with "cochers
vêtus de maeafaranes" and leather
aprons still sufficed *les shingles
défilés*. Aristide Briant, red-scarfed,
delighted the Chat noir, or the Bolle
à Furs, in Goulue and Valentin le
Décaisé the Moulle, Rouge, watched
(and sketched) by "une porta de
gnone barbu et moustache aux
loupes petites jantes arquées". The
ultra-nationalist "Baron" Christian
knocked off President Loubet's hat,
an *attentat* which ended after lengthy
proceeds with the deposit of the cane
in the Archives de la Seine. It is
Samaran observes, *un léger jouc* -
evidently the baron, anticipating his
seizure, had, deliberately, not taken
his best.

How long ago it all seems, and
how wonderful that this centenary
recapituler should still have such a
memory for its details. Anecdotes
of such quality will be remembered
long after more serious history is
forgotten.